



DATE A LIVE ENCORE 7

SpiritNo.7
Height144 Three size B69/W55/H70

橘公司

The author
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7



ファンタジア文庫

デート・ア・ライブ アンコール 7

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Date A Girl Case 1: Holiday

“Everyone... would you be willing to listen to me for a bit?”

On a particular holiday from school, Kurumi and her “high school friends” Tohka and Origami decided to go out and spend time together.

“Actually, there’s a certain boy that I’ve harboring feelings for...” Just from the look on their faces, it was clear that Tohka and Origami wanted to hear the details. The two were both high school girls and so they were excited about talking about the topic of love.

“Well, I don’t know him very well but when I first transferred to this school, he was very kind to me and showed me around the campus and the surrounding environment, so... I don’t think that he’s bad.”

“Oh this man sounds like a very kind guy! I think that’s great!”

“I agree with Tohka.”

“Ahhh... is it?” Kurumi couldn’t help but smile happily despite her embarrassment.

“Do either of you have anyone that you like?”

“Hmm...Oh... I also have someone that I like!” Tohka shouted loudly. Origami and Kurumi looked at her curiously.

“Is there?”

“Oh? What kind of boy is he?”

“Hmm, he has really good cooking skills and he makes a lot of delicious meals. I also feel happy after talking to him.”

“I’m sure he’ll love you.”

“What about you, Origami-san?”

“It looks like Origami is in love too.”

“It’s hard to tell with Origami’s personality, but I think a ring would suit her.”

“Oh! This is the time to find out!”

At this time, Origami produced a picture of a concave pattern. “Correct, I found out about this from the internet. Before meeting someone, you need to know everything you can about them.”

“Oh...”

“T-To do such a thing! Does the other person think the line is black and white?”

“I know that he hangs out with Tonomachi since the break is still in my classroom. Fufu.”

“...”

“This is... quite a classroom.”

After Origami finished, Tohka and Kurumi’s cheeks were dripping with sweat from her explanation.

Origami herself was also a little embarrassed and her face became a little red.

“I feel a strong resonance.”

“I-Is that right?”

“It’s like you two were cut from the same cloth... so maybe you’ll have the same love.”

Kurumi cleared her throat looking refreshed,” So anyway, let’s see who will match first?”

“I’m not going to lose while I still live!”

“This game is where I have the upper hand!”

The three of them said as they continued to walk together with smiles on their faces.

Date A Girl Case 2: Magical Girls

“Holy flames bathed in light, gorgeous transformation! Magical Girl Camael has appeared!”

“Incorruptible raindrops... innocent Zadkiel has appeared...!”

“Pseudo-makeup mirror of seven variations, Beauty Haniel has appeared, you.” (Chaotic Hymn: Camael, Zadkiel, and Haniel were actually Kotori, Yoshino, and Natsumi’s Angels respectively).

In conjunction with the mysterious music that came from seemingly nowhere, the three magical girls shared their titles. While posing, petals flew out and scattered around them.

“Okay, it’s time to get going! Let’s protect the peace of the city together!”

“Yes...!”

“...”

Zadkiel answered Camael’s words hesitantly. However, there was one magical girl who was huddled silently in a corner—it was Haniel.

“What’s wrong, Haniel? There isn’t an enemy hidden there, is there?”

“...No, then, I suddenly felt a sense of shame. I think that I should spend a bit more time in the background... At least the little animals that would say “I can feel a terrible stench”... or saying some kind of line like that... right?”

“Then, that’ll become our mascot, Haniel...”

“Although that is possible... but the problem is that I’m not beautiful regardless... compared to Kotori and Yoshino, but why am I...”

“...! Wait, you shouldn’t call us by our real names!”

“Hey, isn’t this supposed to be about not revealing our names?”

“After listening to what Camael said, Natsumi’s eyes, as Haniel, widened. It was true that their real names had not been exposed. It looked like Magic could be really powerful.

At that moment, Yoshino, as Zadkiel, said.

“C-Camael, Haniel, the enemy is approaching...!”

As she said that, there were many enemies that resembled giant puppets rushing at them with their hands flailing. Natsumi panicked and frantically prepared to escape from the scene of the battle.

But—

“Burn it to the ground! Magical Megiddo!”

“Sleep... Innocent Siryon.”

The axe in Kotori’s hand fired a giant plume of fire. At the same time, there was a powerful burst of ice sprayed out of <Yoshinon’s> mouse. The enemy was instantly defeated.

“Eh?!”

Natsumi couldn’t help but yell because of their incredible powers contrary to their cute appearances.

“Wait, are there really magical girls with those kinds of destructive abilities?! My ability only allows me to transform into a mirror?!”

“What are you talking about, Haniel? Would that sort of ability be ideal for spying or destroying the work? The mafia and drug gangs that you’ve crushed can’t be counted!”

“When did I ever do such a thing?! Isn’t it more realistic to say that enemy organization is too dangerous?! Isn’t that not the sort of opponent that magical girls fight?!”

“...! We received a message from headquarters. It looks like tomorrow night, a bunch of violent Japanese organizations plan to exchange arms with the Russian Mafia...”

“What? By the time you got to Haniel, we’d transitioned into the mafia invasion to suppress a trading scene!”

“E-E-E-Ehhhhhh!”

The magical girl Haniel was dragged away by her companions before she could figure out the situation.



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Date A Girl Case 3: Idol

In a room in the artist's office, the members of the idol group: Kaguya, Yuzuru, and Nia were all intently watching the results of the popular vote with stern expressions on their faces.

"Oh... the first place goes to the popular idol, Miku...?"

"Disapproval. How can we catch up to her."

"Um... do you want to investigate the reasons for her high popularity and then imitate it?"

After Nia finished speaking, Kaguya put a hand to her chin.

"The reason why Miku's songs are so... popular?"

"Agree. But we can't learn that song."

"Hey but Kaguyan and Yuzurun are good. I don't have a voice like that. Even if I wanted to sing..."

"Maybe you didn't realize it but didn't you suggest something dangerous just now?!"

Kaguya shouted in response to Nia's suggestion. Nia, however, showed a shameless smile.

"Well, if you have any other ideas then go for it. But do you like girls? It seems there is also a business for yuri-type songs. There's no interest in men so maybe it's an original relief for fans?"

"O-Original."

"Proposal. It's not too late to give it a try at the next concert. Why don't we put our arms around each other during the next intermission."

"Oh! How about I kiss the back of your hand like a prince!"

In this way, the meeting between the three of them continued like this.

A few days later, the day of the concert arrived. Four people, including Miku, sang and danced on the stage and were swept by fanaticism.

After the end of the first song, they entered the intermission.

After making eye contact with Kaguya and Yuzuru, she stretched her hands towards their waists while moving sexily.

However, in the next moment, they gasped.

“...Ah?!”

Because, at the moment when the two moved to hug each other, Miku somehow managed to appear between them.

“Ah! The sister sandwich of my dreams!”

Miku spoke in a coquettish voice while showing an excited expression on her face.

“N-No...?!”

“Trembling. I didn’t notice her...”

Both of their eyes widened in surprise but they couldn’t interrupt the concert. The two could only return to the concert in distress.

During the next interlude, Nia adopted a more serious expression and knelt on her knee on the stage, ready to kiss Yuzuru’s hand.

“Yes! Nia-san is so bold!”

“...?! I thought I was kissing Yuzuru’s hand but I ended up kissing Mikki’s?!”

Nia, at that moment, had no idea what to say, she had no idea what she had done.

They couldn’t win against a true idol in many senses of the word.

The trio of Kaguya, Yuzuru, and Nia now held reverence and a trace of fear for the great idol, Izayoi Miku.

As a result, the concert was a great success, and Miku’s popularity became more rock-solid.



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FoodfightTOHKA, ExperienceYOSHINO, ValentineKURUMI, ExchangeYAMAI,
BurglarMIKU, MeasurementMIKIE, MarriagehuntREINE

CONTENTS

大胃王比賽**十香**

013

體驗入學**四糸乃**

055

情人節**狂三**

101

互換身分**八舞**

139

怪盜**美九**

187

測驗**美紀惠**

233

獵婚**令音**

275

後記

307

精霊

THE SPIRIT

隣界に存在する特殊災害指定生命体。発生原因、存在理由ともに不明。
こちらの世界に現れる際、空間震を発生させ、周囲に甚大な被害を及ぼす。
また、その戦闘能力は強大。

対処法 1

WAYS OF COPING 1

武力を以てこれを殲滅する。
ただし前述の通り、非常に高い戦闘能力を持つため、達成は困難。

対処法 2

WAYS OF COPING 2

——デートして、デレさせる。

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Tohka Food Fight

“Uh... uh...uh ahhhhh!”

“Ahm... uhm...!”

Tohka and Mukuro intently stuck the sticks into their mouths before turning their gazes on each other.

There was a powerful heat lingering about despite the fact that it was a chilly winter day.

Regardless, both sides were so stuffed that they couldn't speak. However, the fighting spirit gleaming in their eyes expressed more than mere words could ever hope to convey.

“Not bad, Mukuro!”

“Muku shall never yield!”

This was the conversation between God and man that couldn't hope to be interpreted by the five senses on their own.

A battlefield; a feast; a deathmatch.

In the eyes of the onlookers, it was a strange scene to behold.



“Well...”

One winter day, Yatogami Tohka sat in the Itsuka household as she squeezed an orange that she held in her palm while sitting at a warm table alone while groaning softly.

She is a girl characterized by long dark hair like the night sky and dreamy crystal eyes. Right now however, her beautiful expression was sorrowful and confused.

“Muu... but still...”

“Hey, Tohka?”

“What are you doing?”

Just as Tohka was about to toss the orange still in her hand into her mouth, a faint voice came from behind her. Tohka looked up at the sound and spotted two people that emerged into the room. One is a teenager with neutral average features while the other was a petite redheaded girl

with her hair tied in long pigtails. These are the residents of this family: Itsuka Shido and Itsuka Kotori.

“Oh! I’m bothering you, Shido! Kotori!”

Tohka apologized.

“Uh... that’s not the problem right now.”

Shido said while pointing at Tohka’s hand.

“Eh?...Oh!”

Tohka followed Shido’s gaze and spotted the oranges. This was no surprise, after all, Tohka was about to eat the oranges with the skin still on them.

“Sorry, thanks for reminding me, Shido.”

Tohka said gratefully, “I was about to make a stupid mistake.”

“What! That’s it?...I thought that you couldn’t stand the hunger anymore and decided to eat the orange with the skin still on...”

“Muu...?”

“No... it’s nothing...”

As he and Kotori exchanged meaningful looks, Shido put on a bitter smile.

“Are you upset about something? If you don’t mind, you can always talk with us if you need help.”

“Oh, really?”

Tohka asked eagerly. Her eyes sparkled brilliantly. This time, Kotori nodded as well.

“Of course,” Kotori nodded, “Taking care of the Spirits is an important job as part of <Ratatoskr>... and I also consider Tohka my friend as well...”

Kotori admitted, a little embarrassed. As a result, Tohka’s eyes went wide as she let out a surprised “Oh!”

“Is this the one? Is this the so-called tsundere?!”

“What, did you just show a proud attitude just now?” Kotori demanded.

“So where did you learn that word, Tohka?”

Shido asked suspiciously.

“Nia told me about them.”

Tohka said proudly.

“That woman...”

Shido sighed as he smiled bitterly.

After waiting for Tohka to finish speaking, Kotori showed a sullen expression on her face before sighing and looking back at Tohka.

“Forget about that. What are you so worried about?”

“Actually, I’m worried about Mukuro.”

“Mukuro?”

Shido tilted his head and asked. Tohka nodded as she said yes.

Mukuro Hoshimiya was a girl who lived in an apartment next door to the Itsuka household like Tohka and the other Spirits. Her powers were sealed by Shido just a few days ago.

“Well... I’ve had this feeling that she hates me. It’s as if she’s deliberately avoiding me,” Tohka murmured sadly.

“Deliberately avoiding you? Did something happen between you two specifically?”

“Well, yesterday, Yoshino, Yoshinon, Natsumi, and Mukuro were chatting in the apartment lobby. I also walked over and wanted to join them but when Mukuro saw my face, she quickly turned and left.”

“Hmmm...”

“So it’s like that...”

Shido and Kotori put their hands on their chins and let out a gentle sigh.

Tohka sighed and said:

“Among other things, Mukuro was playing video games with Kaguya and Yuzuru. When I walked by, she was having fun but then she noticed me and immediately left.”

“Hmm...”

“Also, did you know that there’s a custom in Tengu City for girls to rub each other’s chests when they are happy? Miku introduced it to Mukuro today.”

“Wait a second! I feel like this matter is much more pressing than the situation with Mukuro!”

There was sweat on Kotori’s cheeks as she muttered, “I can’t stand Miku.”

After clearing his throat and recovering his spirit, Shido continued:

“Anyway, it really sounds like Mukuro is avoiding Tohka.”

“Well, that’s right. However, I have no idea why she’s avoiding me. Did I do something to offend her unknowingly?”

“Ah... um...”

“Muu, that’s right.”

Tohka finished her expression with confusion while Shido and Kotori folded their arms and frowned deeply. Rather than saying that they weren’t taking Tohka’s problem seriously, it’s more accurate to say that they couldn’t come up with a way to explain it carefully.

“Uhhhhhh... you mean you don’t remember...?”

“All Mukuro knows about you is your inverse form, Tohka. Given that experience, it makes sense that she doesn’t want to face you...”

“Inverse?” asked Tohka, expressing her doubts.

“Oh, no, everything is fine now.” Kotori waved a hand dismissively to deny the matter.

“In short, Mukuro misunderstood you. As long as you get a chance to talk to her as you are now, surely you two will be able to get along well.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Now that I think about it, tomorrow is a holiday, so why don’t you and Mukuro go shopping together? Let me ask her if she can tag along with you.”

After discussing the matter with Kotori, Shido looked a little disturbed.

“Is it really okay for them to go by themselves? I’m not too worried about Tohka but Mukuro might be a little unstable since she was just sealed. Wouldn’t it be better if I go along with them?”

Shido asked Kotori uncertainly.

“If you’re there, Mukuro’s Spirit powers will definitely be more stable,” Kotori agreed, “But then she’ll only talk to you, and Tohka won’t be able to achieve her goal of improving the relationship between her and Mukuro. Don’t worry about it though. <Ratatoskr> will monitor them.”

“Hmm... you’re right,” said Shido finally, “Tohka, do you want to try this?”

“Oh! I want to try!”

Tohka replied enthusiastically after listening to Shido and Kotori’s suggestion, her eyes glowing brilliantly with excitement.

Perhaps it was the expectation that she and Mukuro would be able to get along and the excitement brought upon by a heavy responsibility of introducing the city to the new Spirit, Tohka couldn’t help but lean out her body as she pulled her feet out of the warm table and with a single fluid movement, stood up.

“I have to hurry! I can’t stand waiting anymore!”

“Oh? Where are you going?”

“Back to my room! I have to show Mukuro all the great places in this town! I need to hurry and plan the shopping route for tomorrow!” After Tohka shook her hands vigorously, she rushed out of the Itsuka residence to return to her own room.



“Oh! Mukuro! I have much to show you today! Please take good care of me today!”

The next day, Tohka waited neatly and patiently at the door of the apartment complex and Mukuro followed Kotori down the path, dragging her feet up and down.

The girl braided her long blonde hair into three braids while wrapping them around her shoulders. Her golden eyes were gloomy as she looked at Tohka with watchful eyes.

“Nushi-sama, is it really okay for Muku to go with her? That woman won’t suddenly bite Muku, will she?” Mukuro whispered softly in Shido’s ear. Shido could only shrug and smile weakly in response.

“She’s not a dog... and didn’t we explain it yesterday? The Tohka you met before was just one version of her. It’s not her real self. Do you think you can face her now?”

“Mun...”

Mukuro showed an understanding but conflicted expression, then nodded, promised, and moved from her place behind Shido.

“...Tohka, although Muku has no desire to die, Muku shall reluctantly accept Nushi-sama’s words and accompany you today. You should be grateful.”

“Oh! Thank you very much!”

Tohka raised Mukuro’s hand and uttered those words openly. Mukuro’s eyes widened at the unexpected reply and she glanced down at the path before them.

“Right?”

“...Okay.”

Mukuro shook off Tohka’s hand with a displeased expression.

“Don’t waste your time here, leave quickly!”

“Okay! Shido! Kotori! Let’s go!”

“Be careful on the road and make sure to come back before dinner!” Shido and Kotori watched the two as they headed out.

“Okay!” Tohka responded with hundred-fold spirit to the word ‘dinner’ as Kotori said it.

“Also, what are we having for dinner today, Shido?” Tohka asked.

“Um, today, I have fine beef at home. I wanted to make roast beef... but the oven isn’t working properly so I may have to change to another dish,” said Shido as he glanced at Kotori. “I told Kotori it was time to buy a new type of microwave baking oven.”

“Huh? Why not just take the one we have for repair?”

“I told you, there’s a new oven that’s much better than the one we have now, it’s called a microwave baking oven that makes beef very soft when roasted,” said Shido earnestly.

“Fine. Fine. I’ll listen to what you have to say later. Anyway, Tohka, Mukuro, be careful on the road, got it?” Kotori finished and waved to the two Spirits. Shido continued to plead with her but she seemed to ignore his words as she waved them off.

“Umu, let’s go, Mukuro!”

“...Okay...” Mukuro replied reluctantly as Tohka grabbed her hand and marched forward proudly.

As they walked, Tohka hummed a song softly while they walked through the residential area toward the main road.

Soon after, Mukuro’s voice came from behind her: “Tohka, where are we going?”

“Oh! I haven’t told you yet!”

Her eyes widened in realization. She turned her head to look at Mukuro while her hand rummaged through the small bag slung on her shoulder and took out a notepad. This was the greatest shopping manual of Tengu City, which Tohka compiled the previous evening in her room. At that moment, Tohka looked like a police officer or a detective as she opened the notepad before turning to the plans written within with a smile.

“First—Burger steak,” she decided after a moment’s deliberation.

“Mun?”

Mukuro listened to what Tohka had said and tilted her head in wonder.

“Oh, sorry! This is a charcoal grilled giant hamburger called [Kanonmaru] on this road,” Tohka explained.

“No, Muku is not asking for details,” she shook her head and then asked, “Is this for lunch? It feels too early...”

“Is that so? Should I change places?” Tohka asked.

“...No, Muku shall entrust this to you. Just guide Muku.”

“Then it’s decided! Let’s go!”

Tohka said spiritedly as she led Mukuro to the hamburger specialty store down the road.

The store featured a chalet-style^[1] atmosphere and at the front of the store was a large chalkboard with “Today’s Recommended Menu” written in large handwriting. After Tohka pushed the large wooden door open, a loud and powerful voice sounded from close to the counter.

“Welcome! Oh! Tohka! I see you brought a friend with you today!”

¹ Chalet-styled buildings are a building type generally seen in the alpine region of Europe. It is made of wood, with a heavy, gently sloping roof and wide, well-supported eaves set at right angles to the front of the house.

The man at the counter had a barrel-like body with hands and feet as thick as logs, the burly shopkeeper smiled heartily at the pair.

“Okay! Manager, I want to order the usual, please!”

“Got it. Does your friend want the same thing as you, Tohka?” The manager asked Mukuro. Mukuro seemed startled, but then quickly nodded and said yes.

“Understood. I’ll take care of your order right away so feel free to take a seat where you want and wait.”

“Sorry to trouble you! Mukuro, let’s go this way.”

“M-Mun...” Mukuro replied as Tohka guided her to their seats within the shop.

“Huh?”

Mukuro sat down at the four person booth, carefully looking around at the store before her gaze drifted to Tohka who was seated right across from her.

—To be perfectly honest, Mukuro cared very little for the girl named Tohka who sat across from her. As far as she was concerned, she felt justified in her feelings. When Shido took her out on a date a short while ago, this girl suddenly broke in and attacked them mercilessly. She forced Shido to lie on the ground while she sat on him. It was hardly a surprise that Mukuro didn’t trust or even like Tohka.

“...”

All of that being said, it was almost impossible to believe that the girl in front of her was the same as the Spirit she’d met in the past. No, while her looks were the same as before, her manners and gentle expressions—especially the way that she was genuinely happy from the bottom of her heart as she waited for the hamburger to be delivered to them. It was very different from the cold Spirit Mukuro remembered.

Hadn’t Kotori told her that she’d only met one side of Tohka the last time they met... Although it wasn’t clear, perhaps it was a double personality? For now, at least, she didn’t seem to have any malicious intentions, much less bitterness. Kotori might be right. If so, then maybe Mukuro could try to get along with her...

“Sorry to keep you waiting! The same order for two!”

While Mukuro was thinking about this kind of thing, the manager appeared out of nowhere and placed the sizzling iron plate in front of the two of them. The burger steak on the iron plate was about the size of a six year old’s face.

“...Hueh?”

Seeing the meat suddenly appear before them, Mukuro couldn't help but be shocked at its sudden appearance. It clearly smelled delicious. The crackling oil and seductive smell only served to make their mouths water in anticipation. It was just that great and very large as well.

At least, it certainly was a size too big for girls like Tohka or Mukuro to handle. Perhaps the manager mistakenly gave them someone else's order. However, at the moment Mukuro was about to point this out, Tohka, who was sitting across from her, clapped her hands together firmly.

“Oh, here it is! Here it is! Come on, Mukuro! You have to try this! I guarantee that it will be delicious!”

“M-Mun...” While Mukuro was confused, Tohka said vigorously: “I'm going to start!” and without a shred of hesitation, she began to eat the huge hamburger steak.

“Umu! Really delicious! Manager! Your craftsmanship is just as good as ever! I would compare it to the hamburger made by Shido!”

“Haha! Tohka, are you complimenting me like that?”

The shopkeeper chuckled while smiling a little bitterly.

“What are you talking about?” asked Tohka, confused. “That is supreme praise!”

The manager heard Tohka's words and smiled bitterly.

At that moment, Mukuro had yet to move her knife or fork to try the hamburger steak. Tohka tilted her head with a look of doubt on her face.

“Muu? Mukuro, why don't you eat?”

“No... Muku wants to enjoy...” Mukuro cut the burger into a smaller piece before sticking it in her mouth despite her previous confusion. The stewed rich honey sauce and gravy spread out in her mouth. Tohka was right: this burger was really delicious.

“Hmm... it's so delicious...”

Mukuro admitted quietly.

“Right?”

After Mukuro muttered in a low whisper, Tohka burst into a bright smile. Mukuro suspected that she was happy that the store she recommended was being recognized.

Seeing her expression, Mukuro's attitude softened a little. When she first saw the hamburger, Mukuro thought it was just Tohka looking forward to eating it but it turned out that she just wanted to introduce one of her favorite shops to her.

Upon realizing this, Mukuro looked away from Tohka in embarrassment while continuing to enjoy the hamburger steak.

—After about half an hour.

“...Hooh...”

Although it took a while, Mukuro finally managed to finish the Charcoal Grilled Hamburger steak. She rubbed her round belly and exhaled in satisfaction.

“Yes, it's delicious and satisfying.”

“Umu!”

After Mukuro spoke, Tohka let out an excited cheer.

Incidentally, Tohka had already swept the iron plate where the burger steak sat out of the way and added diced steak, fried shrimp, and potato cakes. Even so, her expression seemed to remain the same: she was just as happy now as she was with the hamburger steak...How was her slender figure able to handle such a large amount of food? The human body—correction, the Spirits—are really mysterious.

“Alright! Let's go to the next shop! There are so many good places in this town!”

“Mun... really? Where are we going next?” Mukuro asked while thinking to herself: she'd eaten a little too much so she would prefer to avoid places with intense exercise. It would probably be best to go to some shops or a department store, buy some things, and take a break in a scenic place.

As Mukuro reflected, Tohka pulled out her notepad and after consulting it for a couple seconds, she put it back and nodded.

“Next—let's go eat some Tonkatsu^[2].”

“Mun?”

This unexpected remark from Tohka caught Mukuro by surprise.

² Tonkatsu is a Japanese dish that consists of a breaded, deep-fried/tempura pork cutlet. It involves cutting the pig's back center into 2-3 centimeter thick slices, coating with panko, frying them in oil, and then serving with Japanese Worcestershire sauce, rice, and vegetable salad.

“Well...wow...”

After about 3 hours, Mukuro was following Tohka as they walked down the road while she exhaled painfully. This was no wonder. After they left the hamburger steak shop and took her to the Tonkatsu shop, she then took Mukuro to a rotary sushi shop, an Italian restaurant, and finally a donut shop. Mukuro, who'd be forced to tag along with her, felt that her belly was fit to burst at any second.

Tohka, on the other hand, despite having eaten six times as much food as Mukuro had, was still full of energy—if anything, after eating all of that food, her state seems to be better than before. Looking at Tohka's domineering back, Mukuro suddenly had the illusion of a sound of warming and that she was always ready to go.

“Can we slow down, Tohka?”

“Muu? What's wrong, Mukuro? Did you not have enough to eat?”

“No, it's not that.” Mukuro shook her head. “Muku wants to be able to go to other places... besides restaurants.”

“Oh, I see!” said Tohka as she spread her palms before consulting her notepad once more, sliding her fingers across the paper.

“What about the aquarium or the movie theater that Shido took me to?”

Tohka suggested after a moment of thought.

“O-Oh... that sounds nice,” Mukuro replied.

It seemed that Tohka's notepad had information about things aside from restaurants as well. Mukuro sighed in relief to catch her breath and grant herself a peace of mind.

“Plus, the fish biscuits sold at the aquarium and the popcorn I ate while watching a movie are especially delicious!”

“...” Faced with Tohka's brilliant smile, Mukuro could only remain silent.

...At least it was better than being taken to another restaurant. Mukuro didn't bother to protest and nodded quietly in agreement.

“Well then, let's go to the aquarium and the cinema,” Mukuro suggested.

“Yeah!” Tohka nodded energetically, keeping pace with Mukuro. However—

“Mun?” When they came to the main road, Mukuro stopped. Rather, it was better to say that Tohka who was walking in front of Mukuro stopped suddenly, causing Mukuro to hit her back.

“Tohka, why did you stop so suddenly—,” Mukuro complained. Having said that, Mukuro stopped herself as well, quickly understanding the reason.

“What—” Mukuro only had to glance at the road, eyes widened. Unfortunately, the road itself was being taken for granted on the main road in Tengu City where several men gathered, full of... personality.

“Hehehe... I can’t wait...”

“Come on, bring out today’s offering!”

“Yeah!”

These were all muscular men with buffalo horns; obese men with punk-like expressions^[3] and so on. All of them were wearing leather clothing with rivets attached all over their bodies.

“Yes, there is a strong sense of doomsday warriors.” Yeah! Yeah!”

“What’s wrong with these people?”

With sweat dripping from his cheeks and after raising his eyebrows, he spotted Tohka and Mukuro. At the sight of them, his eyes widened as though he’d discovered something important.

“...! You are?!”

“How could this happen?”

“My brothers, look! It’s the <Queen>! The <Queen> of Tengu City is here!”

“What did you say!”

As soon as the punk man made the declaration, the other men reacted as they spotted Tohka and Mukuro and began to encircle them.

“Hahahaha! <Queen>! You’ve appeared out of the blue!”

“I have been waiting for this day for many years and today I must spit out the years of resentment that has been building up inside of me! My cheek, which has been hurt by you, is still in pain...”

³ I believe this is referring to a mohawk or a similar hairstyle where a person’s hair is styled such that the sides are shaved and the center is either freestanding or gel is added to make appear spiky or potentially a combination of the two.

Some of the men were talking, others were banging their knuckles, and still others were licking their knives.

“<Queen>...?” Hearing the other person’s description of Tohka, Mukuro tilted her head before turning her gaze to Tohka. However, it was plainly obvious that Tohka looked just as confused as Mukuro felt. She showed an expression that made it clear that she didn’t have a clue what the men were talking about either.

“<Queen>? Are you talking about me?” Tohka asked, “What the hell is that?”

“The <Queen> who has conquered all of the Big Steak menus in Tengu City is none other than Yatogami Tohka! This name is among the big stomach king fighters in this area but it seems that no one knows about her!”

“Big stomach king fighter...?”

Hearing these strange words, Mukuro turned her head once more to express her doubts. Before she could, one of the men wearing horns raised his arms while raising the corners of his mouth in a fearless smile.

“That’s right! It refers to the original desire of humanity. It is also the original sin [appetite] or the warrior who challenges the limits of [quantity]!”

“...Surprisingly, Muku gets it: whoever eats the most in this competition is the winner?”

“Gahaha! That’s it!” The man laughed arrogantly while Mukuro tilted her head while pointing at the laughing man’s clothing.

“The truth is clear. But what’s the matter of waiting in that type of dress? It has nothing to do with eating?”

“Gahaha! What stupid thing are you talking about, no matter what! We are big stomach soldiers! Since they are called soldiers, of course they have to wear battle costumes when they go to the battlefield!” said the man confidently. Mukuro could feel sweat dripping down her cheeks.

“I-Is that so? Muku thought that the horns would prevent eating.”

“Well, if you are too weak. Even if you are also a big stomach king warrior, each has its own type. Uncle Ben who is good at eating steaks at the same time (the supreme piece of meat) Ushiyama shows his identity in this form!”

“So what about the fat man rolling around?” Mukuro pointed him out.

“That guy is Katsuda, an oil like a drink, who loves pork cutlets.”

“What about the cockscomb^[4] man?”

“He is <Greedy Ghost> Furano. No one can beat the speed of eating fried chicken fast like he can.”

“...something like this...” Mukuro scratched her cheek. Although she seemed to understand the infection in the atmosphere, she still didn’t understand what was going on. “Never mind, so why are these big stomach king fighters gathered here?”

“Hmm... does it need to be said? Look there!” Ushiyama raised his hand and slammed it into the horn of the helmet he was wearing.

Although the scene was confusing to both Tohka and Mukuro, they still looked in the direction Ushiyama pointed. Their eyes widened.

The reason being that there was a large stage set up in the middle of the avenue with the words “Tengu City Food Fight!” clearly written on a banner strung up across the stage.

“As you can see,” Ushimaya went on, “if there was ever an activity that could gather so many fighters, this is it! It will be decided here today! To decide who is the first big stomach king warrior in Tengu City!” He rounded on Tohka:

“Hey! Stop trying to play pretend, <Queen>. A big stomach king warrior like you, wouldn’t you want to say that you happened to get into this place?”

“Uh, it just so happens...” Even though Tohka spoke with a puzzled expression. Her words seemed to have gone in one ear and out the other for these men whose fighting spirits only intensified in Tohka’s presence.

“I won’t forget! I finished the “KARLY” Big Steak curry two months ago, setting the fastest record. However, you who appeared after I did manage to clear TWO “KARLY” Big Steak curries in the same amount of time, which broke my record. My record was replaced within five minutes at the store!”

“I ended up eating too much Everest Spaghetti in order to fight against you when you sat next to me. I ended up walking unsteadily on the way home and hurt my cheek!”

“It feels like they are very angry.” The men ignored Mukuro’s words.

That said, Tohka had no no plans of dealing with them while holding Mukuro’s hand while avoiding the mens’ gaze.

⁴ In this case, Mukuro is using the term to describe someone whose hair is styled like that of a chicken’s head crest.

“Sorry, I’m currently shopping with Mukuro right now and I have no business with you today,” said Tohka as she moved to leave the area.

However, the group of men were nothing if not persistent and consolidated their siege and blocked Tohka’s path.

“Oh, that won’t work.”

“How could I possibly miss this chance to free myself of this shame?”

“Is it really okay to be the <Queen> and run away from the enemy?”

“Well...” Tohka looked sad. As a Spirit, it would only take two or three attacks to take the men down. However, the existence of the Spirits was supposed to be a secret so it wasn’t a good idea to cause a commotion on the road where ordinary people come and go.

“Don’t be so vigilant, <Queen>. We won’t try to force you if you are dead set against it.”

“Besides, this proposal isn’t bad. After all, the winner can get 100,000 yen worth of luxurious meal coupons and the latest type of microwave baking stone oven. It is important that the contestants can fill their stomachs both inside and outside. Anyway, these two prizes are going to be mine.” The men showed ambitious eyes and smiled. It was clear that the onlookers favored them to be the winners.

“Muu... A microwave baking stone oven...?” At that moment, Tohka seemed to remember it as she put a hand to her chin in thought.

“Tohka, what happened?” she blinked at the sound of Mukuro’s voice.

“No, it’s just that I remembered that Shido said that the old oven was acting weird and that he wanted to get a new one.”

“Oh, to listen to you say these kinds of things...” After Mukuro answered, Tohka murmured something to herself and made a contemplative action. She then faced Mukuro.

“Sorry, Mukuro, can I borrow some of your time?”

“Huh...? Anyway, could it be you...” After Mukuro began to speak, Tohka nodded forcefully.

“Okay, it seems like it will be very difficult for me to leave from here without causing a commotion. If I win, I get to take the microwave baking stone oven and go back home. I think it would make Shido very happy.” Tohka smiled slightly as her cheeks glowed red.

“Okay,” Mukuro put a hand on her chest to suppress her racing heart. She understood full well that there was no need to monopolize Shido anymore. But what was happening to her right now? There was a stab of irritation in her chest that Mukuro didn’t understand.

“Alas Tohka, do you think Nushi-sama would like that?” Mukuro asked.

“Muu? Are you talking about Shido? Of course I like him the most! That’s why I want to see him happy!”

“...Mun...”

As Tohka spoke with a broad smile across her face, Mukuro saw her expression and heard her words but still felt that same pain in her chest. The reason was simple. It was because she imagined Shido’s joy when he received that gift from Tohka.

The feeling of being upset gradually strengthened inside Mukuro’s being. There was no need to ask questions. She already knew that Tohka liked Shido a lot. It was just like Tohka said, Shido would be very happy and Mukuro would be able to see his happy expression. Just—

“...!”

Just then—

Mukuro frowned at the slightly strange feeling surging through her. She felt her body grow warmer and the heat seemed to gather in her heart at the center of her chest.

“This is...” Mukuro slowly opened her hand and set her sights on her palm while holding her breath quietly.

“—Tohka!” When the time passed, Mukuro cried out. Tohka, who was following the men toward the stage, stopped and turned her head in wonder.

“What’s wrong, Mukuro?”

“You must allow Muku... to participate in this contest!” After Mukuro said that, Tohka and the mens’ eyes widened in surprise.



“The [Tengu City Food Fight] is finally about to start! The hungry big stomach king warriors are making their way onto the stage, and looking forward to the start of the gong sound!” The host’s loud voice rang out through the loudspeaker as Tohka listened to the host on a specific set stage.

On the stage, there is a whole row of big-sized men, and now you can see many audiences who don't know when to gather. Beside her was Mukuro whose expression showed a strong determination.

That's right, Mukuro decided to join the competition and the registration was officially completed.

"Well, it's really surprising to see you participate. Mukuro, are you sure that you can keep going?" Mukuro had eaten more than her fair share of food during their shared excursion.

"M-Mun... that's true..." Mukuro admitted as she glanced uncertainly at Tohka.

"...?"

The atmosphere seemed strange. Tohka felt something was wrong, but when she was about to ask, the loudspeaker took the lead and re-sounded the host's voice.

"The rules of the game are simple! The player who eats the most hotdog castles within the specified time limit is the winner! That's it!"

"Well, does everyone have a hot dog castle on their tables? No, no, don't start eating yet."

"—So, I hereby announce... let the games begin!"

"OH!"

Everyone let out a loud cheer as, under the command of the host, the big stomach fighters on the stage began to eat the hot dogs from the castle on their tables all at the same time.

Tohka folded her hands and said, "I'm moving" before grabbing a hot dog castle in front of her and biting down on it.

"Ahhh... ohhh... this tastes so good!"

She could feel the toasted bread and crispy sausage went straight into her mouth. Even though it was mass produced for a contest, the taste is definitely not bad.

Even though this was a fast-eating contest, at the end of the day, it was still eating. Tohka enjoyed the taste and aroma of the hot dog castle, chews and swallows in one breath.

Among the big stomach king fighters, some people tried to increase their speed by eating the sausage first and then soaking the bread with water, but that can no longer be called a hot dog castle, but a bread with sausage soaked with water. Maybe it can be finished quickly, but Tohka doesn't like this way very much.

The players are fierce, eating hot dog castles one by one! — Oops! Soon, someone seems to be eliminated! Specifically, some players with corners on their helmets interfered with the players on both sides and were disqualified! Katsuda's throat was choked by dry bread without oil and eliminated! It was here that Furano remembered that he doesn't like meat other than chicken!

As the competition progressed, more and more participants were eliminated as they were named on the loudspeaker. Tohka thought that it was a shame to not like meat other than chicken as she reached out for another hot dog castle.

So—

“Oh! What do we have here! At this time, some players are about to start the second set! It's the last minute contestant: Mukuro Hoshimiya!”

“...! Really?!”

Hearing the host's voice throughout the venue, Tohka's eyes widened in surprise and glanced at her.

The big stomach king fighters who sat in a row only managed to eat a half of their hot dog castle so far, and even Tohka who'd only just managed to finish her first hot dog castle, but Mukuro was already on her second plate. She probably felt Tohka's gaze on her and she returned her gaze with an arrogant smile.

“Ah, Tohka, if you are negligent, the title of champion will be taken away,” said Mukuro as she grabbed another hot dog and tossed it into her mouth and then swallowed it almost without chewing. Seeing this magical scene, the audience burst into applause.

“Oh! That's a whole set, Mukuro!”

How could I lose to her? It was a game that couldn't hold up, but if chess meets rivals, things will be different.

Tohka ignited her own fighting spirit and ate up the hot dog castle in her hand. She raised her hand and asked for another plate.

—Big stomach king warrior with various expressions, gorging on the hot dog castle.

Sure enough, he is a veritable “King Warrior”. The appearance of a biting hot dog fortress, not so much as eating, is more reminiscent of the word fighting.

“But... victory will be Muku's!” Mukuro murmured to herself and shoved the hotdog castle into her mouth.

The hot dog castle, which she didn't even bother chewing the hotdog castle, before swallowing it whole. When the audience saw this, they burst into applause and the cheers were thunderous.

After Mukuro smiled, she reached out and touched her throat. When it came to eating fast, there was not a person on earth who could beat the current Mukuro.

Because Mukuro used her key Angel <Michael> to open a hole in her throat to transfer the hot dog to other spaces.

That's right. The moment before the game started, a small key appeared in Mukuro's hand. At that moment, Mukuro remembered that Kotori warned her that if her mental state were to become unstable, she could cause a backflow of Spirit power and told her to pay attention and exercise caution. At the time, she was worried that the pain in her chest caused a backflow of Spirit power to allow her to summon her Angel.

Mukuro soon realized that as long as she had the power of <Michael>, winning the contest was not just a dream.

Sure, it was an unfair advantage. Even if the true stomach king warrior was present, as long as the capacity of the stomach is limited, no one could eat endlessly. Regardless of the size of the meal, Mukuro was the strongest existence in history.

Having said that, Mukuro had no intention of wasting any of the food she was eating. The hole in her throat led to another one in her room back at the Spirit mansion as they were. Then she planned to freeze them and eat them slowly over time.

In short, Mukuro's first priority was defeating Tohka in the contest and winning the microwave baking stone oven for Shido. It would make Shido happy and if he received it from Mukuro, he was surely going to be even happier.

"Muku is sorry, Tohka. Only in this manner, Muku shall not back down...!"

Mukuro showed sharp eyes and shoved the fourth set into her mouth and raised her hand.

"The last minute entry: Mukuro Hoshimiya has already entered the fifth set! Such amazing speed...Oh! It looks like another person is keeping pace with her! It's Yatogami Tohka!"

"OOOOHHH!"

The audience cheered when the host's voice was heard.

"...!"

The unexpected announcement caught Mukuro off guard as she suddenly turned to look at Tohka.

It was just as the host said, both Mukuro and Tohka had managed to finish the fourth plate completely.

“How-how can this be...?” Mukuro made a surprised sound as she watched Tohka go.

This is no wonder. Tohka’s appetite was no small matter but from that morning, she and Mukuro ate from the Big Steak menus in various stores. Despite this, she was still able to eat hot dog castles at the same speed as Mukuro.

The fifth dish full of hot dog castles was immediately delivered to Tohka. Mukuro and Tohka picked up the hot dog castle, opened their mouths: one person threw it into their mouths with reckless abandon while the other bit down on it.

“...!”

Just then, something felt wrong.

That’s right. The big stomach king fighters present here all showed a sloppy expression like Shura’s and stuffed the hot dog castle into his mouth, except that Tohka ate deliciously and looked happy.

“Well, it’s delicious. I thought the hot dog castle used for the contest wouldn’t taste so good but it did! I didn’t expect it to taste so delicious.”

“Mun...” Seeing Tohka’s expression, Mukuro murmured quietly. But she never gave up. She stuffed her hotdog with her mouth, kept her pace, and successfully accumulated records. The big stomach king fighters and the audience around were probably not expecting that a last minute entry would fight to such an extent that they all cast a shocked look at Mukuro.

And the ranking hasn’t changed, as they reached toward the end of the contest.

Although the other big stomach king fighters continued to struggle, they were still unable to catch up to Mukuro who’d resorted to foul tricks to take the lead.

That’s right—in the end, there’s only one rival.

“—Okay! Time is running out! The current champion seems to be Mukuro Hoshimiya! How does her petite body accommodate nearly 70 hot dog castles?! And with the gap of half of the hot dog castle closely behind, the current <Queen> Yatogami Tohka! How do the girls in Tengu City manage to eat so amazingly!”

The host excitedly heated up the atmosphere of the venue. The audience cheered loudly for the unexpected but nonetheless brilliant performance of the two girls.



However, Mukuro herself was all but powerless by this point. Although she barely managed to take the lead for the championship title, she hadn't expected Tohka to follow so closely behind her. Obviously, the other big stomach king fighters have gradually slowed down but Tohka's pace remained the same.

"...!"

"...!"

Tohka's and Mukuro's eyes met. Of course, both sides were stuffed with hot dog castles and didn't speak. But there was an unobstructed communication between the two in a way beyond words.

"Muku will never give up! This is the only thing that will not give way!"

"Not bad, Mukuro! It's been a long time since I've had this much fun!"

Regardless, as long as she maintained her current speed, the winning prize would go to Mukuro. No matter how powerful Tohka was, she couldn't beat Mukuro whose stomach was effectively a literal bottomless pit.

"Mun..."

However... At that moment, Mukuro stopped moving.

No, it was more accurate to say that she *had* to stop.

When Mukuro forced another hot dog castle into her mouth, she felt an unprecedented touch in her throat, causing her to cough violently. That was the feeling of the hot dog castle really being stuffed into her throat. It seemed that the limited state of <Michael> weakened causing the hole previously in her throat to disappear.

"How... come..."

Mukuro's belly was already full to bursting. Once the "hole" disappeared, she could no longer eat. Mukuro kneeled weakly on the spot.

"Huh uh uh... one more plate!"

During this time, Tohka finished the last hot dog castle and raised her hand for the next plate.

At that moment, a gong sounded to announce the end of the game.

“The crown and champion are decided! The final white-hot victory prevailed and it was the <Queen> Yatogami Tohka that won the glory of the queen! The hard-working Mukuro managed to close behind by half a share and get the runner-up!”

“OOOOOHHHHH!!”

The megaphone sounded the host’s voice, and the audience cheered loudly.

“Mun... so sorry...”

Mukuro covered her mouth and squeezed out her voice.

At this time, a hand suddenly stretched over—it was Tohka.

“Mukuro, you are amazing! You really like good food too!”

“M-Mun...”

In the face of Tohka’s sparkling expression like a sportsman, Mukuro couldn’t help but look away from her. However, Tohka took her hand without a care in the world and pulled her to her feet.

“Wow! Ah! Ah! Ah!” The audience applauded and cheered while Tohka waved vigorously in response.

“...Tohka, w-why is it that you can work so hard?” Mukuro asked with a stern expression, Tohka smiled slightly:

“I want to eat a lot of delicious food! It was fun to play with you this time! And—I still want to see Shido happy!”

“Mun...” Mukuro sighed when she saw Tohka’s innocent and bright smile.

Perhaps it was a change in Mukuro’s expression but Tohka then looked at Mukuro blankly.

“Well? Is there something wrong?”

“It’s nothing. Just a little bit of self-loathing...” Mukuro sighed and said, “Because Nushi-sama said that he wanted the microwave baking stone oven, you didn’t hesitate to do anything to get it and it came to fruition—Tohka, you really are amazing, really... admirable.”

“The microwave baking stone oven? Oh, so you also want to give a gift to Shido?” Tohka’s eyes widened unexpectedly.

Just then, the host with the microphone came over to them.

“Congratulations to both of you! This showdown was very exciting! How are you both feeling right now?” The host asked, pointing the microphone towards Tohka. Tohka faced the microphone with a smile and said:

“Well, it was very delicious! But if you really want me to say, I think a little bit more ketchup is more suitable for my tastes!”

Unexpectedly, Tohka even added a comment about the taste which made the audience laugh. The host also reacted exaggeratedly before continuing:

“Then, please accept the prize voucher and the microwave baking stone oven catalog!”

“Oh!”

After receiving two envelopes with a gift certificate from the host, Tohka raised it high. The audience applauded again.

“—Yeah.”

Tohka bathed in the applause. After a moment, she glanced at Mukuro and handed her the envelope in her left hand—the catalogue for the microwave baking stone oven.

“H-Huh?”

Faced with Tohka’s unexpected behavior, Mukuro stared at her face incredulously. As a result, the corner’s of Tohka’s mouth rose into the shape of a smile.

“Mukuro, give that to Shido. I’m sure he will be very happy.”

“What...”

Mukuro was stunned when she heard it and shook her shoulders.

“What does this mean? You won this. How could you give it away so easily?”

“Okay, so it’s my thing, so who I want to give it to is my choice!”

“B-But!”

Mukuro couldn’t think of a comeback and shook her head vigorously.

“Never, since Muku lost the battle. Tohka should be the one to give it to Nushi-sama.”

“Hmm... but don’t you want to give a gift to Shido too? If you give it to Shido, he will also be very happy!”

“...!”

Tohka’s words were spoken innocently, making Mukuro’s eyes go wide.

Ah! Tohka just wanted to see Shido’s happy expression and it didn’t matter to her who made him happy was secondary.

“Haha... it’s better thanks to you,” Mukuro collapsed and smiled weakly.

“You should give it to Nushi-sama. You won so it would be best that you give it to him.”

“Oh, but...”

“Come on. If it wasn’t something you won—”

“Umm... I’m sorry to bother you both.”

As Tohka and Mukuro continued to argue with each other, the host interjected.

“Did you need something?”

“That is, I want to present a prize to Hoshimiya-san; it’s a 30000 yen meal voucher and an advanced pressure cooker set.

“Mun...”

“Oh!”

The host finished speaking and Tohka and Mukuro looked at each other.



“Shido! This is for you! It’s a pressure cooker set!”

“Nushi-sama! Please accept it! It’s a microwave baking stone oven!”

Upon returning to the Itsuka household, Tohka and Mukuro handed the prizes they won in the big stomach king eating contest to Shido.

“Wow! What’s the matter between both of you? How could you give me something that looks so expensive...”

Shido’s eyes widened in surprise. Tohka and Mukuro looked at each other and smiled, facing him again.

“Oh, I’m not telling!”

“A girl always has to have some secrets, Nushi-sama.”

The two said this with broad smiles while Shido looked puzzled. He sighed shortly afterwards and said:

“Anyway, thank you both. I’ve been wanting to change to the new microwave oven and pressure cooker for a while now. I’ll be sure to use them today to make a delicious dinner for you!”

“Oh! I’ve been looking forward to it!”

“M-Mun...Nushi-sama, you don’t have to do it right now, maybe tomorrow or the next day...”

Tohka answered in a spirited manner. On the other hand, Mukuro lightly smiled as she held her belly.

As the three talked, footsteps came from the second floor and Kotori’s head suddenly poked out of the room.

“Oh, you two are back.”

“Yeah! We’re back!”

“Hmm...”

After Tohka and Mukuro answered, Kotori looked back at them and smiled.

“It seems that the misunderstanding seems to be resolved, right Mukuro?”

“...!”

As Kotori said those words, Mukuro’s eyes widened as if remembering something before glancing at Tohka’s face.

“Mun... yes, she really is different from the woman she met before—Tohka.”

“Huh? What’s wrong? Why are you so solemn?”

“I was so sorry to avoid you in the past. Although it’s a bit late... I’d like to ask you to please continue to take care of Muku in the future.” Mukuro said this and slowly reached out her hand.

“Oh!” Tohka’s eyes glowed, and she also reached out to shake hands with Mukuro.

—However...

Mukuro’s hand passed Tohka’s hand and grabbed her chest directly and then started kneading it.

“What...?! What are you doing, Mukuro!”

“Mun? Was Miku wrong? She told Muku that to make our friendship stronger, it was necessary to rub each other’s chests.”

“Is that so? Ah, Ah... I heard that, I seem to have heard of it from her too. Since that’s the case, there’s nothing we can do about that. I also...”

“You two, that’s utter nonsense!”

When Tohka reached out to try to rub Mukuro’s chest, a loud wailing sound interrupted her.

Yoshino Experience

“Alright everyone! Today, the teacher will be introducing some new friends to everyone!” A class guide announced cheerfully to the second year class B classroom at a junior high school in Tengu City.

“Come in!”

The class guide beckoned gently. After swallowing, Natsumi and Yoshino, who were waiting in the corridor, entered the classroom.

“...Um...”

The two of them stood in front of the teacher’s podium and the junior high school students looked at them curiously. Natsumi shifted uncomfortably with the many students’ gazes on her.

“Could the two of you introduce yourselves?”

“O-Okay,” Yoshino nodded nervously, facing the students in the classroom.

“M-My name is Yoshino... please take good care of me.” She stammered and bowed her head. Her greeting was met with applause from all around the classroom.

It was Natsumi’s turn next. Her fingertips trembled. She took a breath and tried to make a sound.

“My name is Itsuka Natsumi. I only came to school for trivial reasons, but please don’t bother pretending to be familiar with me. Also, if you dare to try to bully Yoshino, I’ll never let you get away with it.”

That’s what Natsumi planned on saying but instead—

“Ska...su... insufficient... admission... but... shino... forgive you...”

Having gained the attention of many people she was meeting for the first time, she became nervous and struggled to make a sound. Although the students did not understand what she was talking about, they still gave her sparse applause.

“Well, it can be inferred from their names that they are relatives of our classmate, Kotori Itsuka. Both of them are here to experience admission. Everyone, please take good care of them.”

“Yes!” The students answered the class guide with vigor.

“...!”

Natsumi was immediately frightened by the loud noise and reflexively shook her shoulders while imagining the nightmarish day and exhaling a heavy breath.



It all started with what happened a few days ago in the Itsuka household's living room.

“...You want to go to school?”

Natsumi repeated the words that shook her tympanic membranes^[5] in despair. Those dreaded words made Natsumi's heart race and caused an increase in her blood circulation around her body. She could feel the temperature rise, her thoughts becoming scrambled, and despite not exercising, she could feel sweat dripping down her forehead.

This is hardly a surprise. After all, it is [school].

However, the person who spoke those accursed words, Yoshino, shook her head in embarrassment but nodded while saying the opposite of Natsumi's thoughts on school.

“Yes... seeing Shido and Kotori go to school, they seem very happy...”

The beautiful curly hair that is different from Natsumi's and the cute face that is different from Natsumi's. If the world is [cute], it would definitely be in the form of Yoshino. This girl's appearance was so cute that Natsumi couldn't help but think of it.

“School...”

“That's right.”

The two were not alone in the Itsuka family living room. Indeed, there were two other people there as well, sitting on the sofa as they rubbed their chins in response to the voice of the goddess: one was a boy with neutral yet gentle features; the other was a young girl with red hair tied in twin tails bound with black ribbons. They were brother and sister.

“Very good.”

“Yes. <Ratatoskr> wants to give the Spirits a chance to figure out what they want to do.”

“What...!”

Facing the unexpected reaction of the two, Natsumi made a change of tone.

⁵ The tympanic membrane is the medical term for the eardrum.

“You two,” she glared at Kotori and Shido, “Are you planning to throw Yoshino into that hellhole?”

“What hellhole...? Aren’t you exaggerating a little too much?”

“It isn’t an exaggeration at all...! That kind of place is just a compulsory shelter for young girls and prisoners! They create a prisoner’s class hierarchy! Those who can’t integrate into the group must be vilified and ridiculed forever! It’s a place to condense the ugliest part of human society!”

“...To speak such mean things about school.” Kotori was so dumbfounded that she couldn’t help but shrug in admiration.

However, Natsumi’s indignant attitude about school made Yoshino’s face dim in disappointment.

“Is school really such a terrible place?”

“That’s right! Don’t be fooled by the school dramas that make you cry! That’s just the school’s publicity! ‘Everyone finally attended the graduation ceremony happily.’ It’s better to have such a thing. The heart-broken bully is scum, the teacher who is afraid of things is useless! Even if he plays the episode of Jinba Sensei!”

Natsumi’s mouth was suddenly covered and rendered speechless. Kotori, for her part sighed and said:

“Calm down. I don’t really get where all this is coming from. After all, schools nowadays are really different to how they were in the past. If you can’t ensure the stability of your mental state however, then as the commander of <Ratatoskr>, I won’t allow you to go to school.”

Kotori glanced at Yoshino’s left hand. Specifically, it was the rabbit puppet Yoshinon that was on her left hand.

“Ah what’s wrong, Kotori? Could it be that you’ve been ensnared by Yoshinon’s cuteness and charm?” Yoshinon twisted her waist with amusement. Kotori turned a blind eye to Yoshinon’s words before flicking the rabbit puppet’s forehead with her fingers.

“It hurts!”

“Ah...”

Probably guessing Kotori’s intentions, Yoshino cast an apologetic and downcast look.

Natsumi also understood what Kotori was saying. If Yoshino was without Yoshinon, she would immediately feel uneasy, causing her sealed Spirit power to flow back into her. If it started to

rain it wouldn't be an issue, but if things started to freeze, then it would become quite troublesome.

She watched the interaction between Yoshino and Kotori. Natsumi figured that she would be able to get out of going to school thanks to Kotori's decision and was about to flash a gesture of victory with her fists.

"So that's how it is. It's too early for Yoshino to be going to school...! It's okay, Yoshino, a school-like place like that..."

However, before Natsumi could finish, Kotori interrupted her and said:

"But I also said that <Ratatoskr> will do the best they can to help the Spirits. First, I will try to see if there is a way to adapt to the school environment in the form of experience enrollment. Is it okay to go to my middle school?"

"...! R-Really...?"

"Oh! Isn't that great, Yoshino?"

After hearing what Kotori said, Yoshino's expression brightened and she was very happy along with Yoshino.

"..."

In such a harmonious atmosphere, only Natsumi looked as though she'd been given a death sentence. Her fist trembled out of nowhere.

"—So..."

At this moment, Kotori set her sights on Natsumi.

"Natsumi, will you be going?"

"Ah!"

Upon hearing those unexpected words, Natsumi made a high octave sound. It was hardly a surprise; she didn't expect things to turn out this way, or for them to affect her.

"D-Don't make such noises. I'm not going. I definitely don't want to go to that kind of place...!"

"Oh... really? Since you don't want to go, I won't force you. I'm just afraid that after Yoshino goes to school, you will feel lonely, so I just thought I'd ask."

"Hmmm..."

Natsumi fell silent.

Kotori was right. Most of the Spirits went to school. If Yoshino went to school as well, then Natsumi would have to spend her days alone.

“Natsumi-san...”

Yoshino’s blue eyes were wet with tears as she gazed earnestly at Natsumi. Being stared at by a goddess with such eyes, how could anyone even hope to refuse her? Natsumi could feel sweat trickling down her forehead...”

“...I’ll go...”

After a few seconds of silence, she sighed with regret.



“—Okay, then you two go find an empty seat and sit down.”

In Class 2B’s classroom, the class guide pointed to the vacant seats. Yoshino nodded.

“Okay.”

“Ah...! Good!”

Natsumi immediately looked away and nodded in reply. The two of them walked toward their respective seats.

She felt a little uneasy, having been separated from Natsumi and Kotori, but Yoshino took a deep breath and changed her mind. The reason she wanted to come to school was not only out of a simple desire, but also to integrate into human society. If she felt uneasy because of a little thing like school, she’d surely have a bad future.

Just as Yoshino came to that conclusion, the class guide explained a few simple contact points and the class meeting was over. All of the students stood up, saluted, and then sat down.

“...!”

At that moment, Yoshino’s eyes widened as she stared around the classroom.

Because at that moment, the surrounding students showed curious expressions as they gathered around Yoshino’s seat.

“Can I ask you where you came from?”

“Is that a rabbit?”

“U-Um...”

Faced with so many unexpected questions, Yoshino didn't know what to do. Thankfully, Yoshinon came up with an answer:

“Could it be that you're curious about Yoshinon? That's to be expected, I suppose. Everyone here is in adolescence, after all.”

“Wow! It can talk!”

“Don't be stupid! It's obviously ventriloquism!”

“It's so cute!”

With Yoshinon's help, the atmosphere was becoming more lively and friendly. Yoshino was originally worried about whether she would be able to get along with the other students she met for the first time.

Then——

“Could you let me introduce myself as well?”

When Yoshino stammered to answer everyone's questions, such a voice suddenly came. The wall was separated towards both sides, and there appeared a young girl who was leading the attendant and looked like a refined young lady at first glance.

“You are...”

“Hi, I'm Ayanokouji Kanon. I'm the class representative.”

“Ah. P-Please take good care of me.”

Yoshino nodded her greetings. Kanon hummed and a proud smile appeared on her face.

“If there's something you don't understand, please don't hesitate to ask me or any of our classmates.”

“O-Okay, classmates——”

“What, you didn't figure it out from my name? Hehehe, I thought so. That's right! My sister, Ayanokouji Karin, won the championship at the previous Ten'ou Festival beauty contest. That night, Miku Izayoi participated as a judge!”

“T-This...?”

Kanon started showing off for some reason while Yoshino responded to her statements with blank looks but her eyes widened. The classmates around them had a look of “here she goes again” along with a wry smile.

“That’s right! But rest assured, I won’t be proud of it at all! Because it was my sister who was recognized by Izayoi Miku, not me. But I’m just the same as my beautiful and kind sister, and we share the same blood!”

“Ahahaha...”

When Yoshino was surprised by Kanon’s enthusiasm, her cell phone began to vibrate.

“Ah!”

Yoshino took out her cell phone. In her excitement to come to school, she’d forgotten to turn it off beforehand. Although she was thankful to the caller, she still had to turn her phone off.

But just then a student in her class exclaimed after seeing the name on the screen.

“Oh! Wait a minute, Yoshino! Your screen shows... Izayoi Miku!”

“...Eh?”

Kanon’s eyes widened as she stared at the screen. She frowned suspiciously and hit the answer button.

“Huh?”

“Yoshino! I heard you started going to middle school! Is it true? Next time, can you get someone to take a picture of you in your uniform? Can you... eh?”

It was probably the tip of the ear that heard the noise of the students and Miku made a muffled sound.

“Ah! Shouldn’t you be in school right now? —I can hear your classmates! People are really tempting Izayoi Miku today, aren’t they?! Please take care of me...!”

“...! T-That... Miku, I’ll call you later...”

Yoshino’s face was flushed and she quickly hung up.

However, the damage was already done. The classmates who heard the call were screaming in excitement, chanting: “Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh!”

“What was that just now? Was that really Izayoi Miku?”

“Just listen to that voice! It must have been her!”

“Yoshino! Do you *know* Izayoi Miku?”

“T-This... uh...ahaha...”

Yoshino smiled as she quickly turned off her phone and stuffed it back in her bag.

“W-Well...”

Among the classmates whose emotions were rising rapidly, Kanon’s fists were clenched a little unwillingly but Yoshino, who was too busy talking to her other classmates, didn’t notice this.

“...”

Natsumi remained silent as she kept her gaze on Yoshino’s seat by herself.

No, it was correct to say that there were two or three classmates who attempted to approach Natsumi in the beginning but Natsumi remained silent and refused to so much as look at her classmates much less talk to them. In the end, no one approached her again.

“Really... the whole point is that you have to get along with everyone in class, Natsumi.”

“I don’t want to spend time with everyone here.”

“You said that again...” said Kotori helplessly. Then she paused, as though thinking of something.

“Ah, right.”

She pulled out a notebook from her seat and laid it out on the desk in front of Natsumi.

“Natsumi, just draw some pictures.”

“Why?”

“It should be fine, right? Can you draw something like Nia’s manga?”

“W-What the hell are you talking about...”

Kotori shook Natsumi’s shoulder while begging for her to draw a picture. Natsumi frowned and sighed. She picked up the pen and began to draw a character from one of Nia’s manga.

Kotori nodded contently before taking a deep breath and said aloud:

“Wow, that’s so good! It turns out that you draw a lot of really cool things, Natsumi!”

“...What?”

Kotori's sudden actions made Natsumi panic. So the students who reacted to Kotori's voice glanced at the notebook on the desk and exclaimed:

“Wow! It's Fatimaye from <SILVER BULLET>!”

“Are you going to draw any of the other characters?”

“Well...! Ah...! Um...!” The students gathered around Natsumi instantly. Natsumi panicked at the attention.

“That's a Super Skill! This isn't the level of a middle school student's painting at all!”

“That's super cool! Really great!”

“...Uh, that...”

“Can I ask, are you planning to become a manga artist in the future?”

“Let's get signatures!”

“...whaaaaaaa?!”

Natsumi couldn't handle everyone's praise, shouting loudly and tearing the notebook at the same time.

“Wow!”

“What, what is this...?”

“Don't look down on people... Don't look down on me...! You say these things, but you are actually mocking me! You think I'm disgusting when I draw manga! I know it! I know it!”

“W-What...?”

Faced with Natsumi's rage, the students looked confused, but quickly dispersed in fright.

After Natsumi caught her breath, she karate chopped Kotori's head.

“Stupid.”

“That hurt.”

“Ugh...”

Natsumi remained speechless as she sat back in her chair and slumped forward on her desk, praying that the class period would end soon.



—From this it was clear that the situation after that was still very tense.

They'd just finished their third lesson of the day. After the math and English lessons, the students changed into sportswear and gathered in the gym where they were to play volleyball for the day. More specifically, they were learning how to hold the ball properly.

“Okay, let's find some friends and form a group!” said the PE teacher loudly, clad in appropriate sportswear. The students, similarly clad in sportswear, spread out in small groups, looking for friends to form a team.

“Uh, I...”

Yoshino looked around, perplexed before spotting Natsumi standing alone.

“Ah, Natsumi—!”

She moved to form a team with Natsumi. But at that moment, a refined lady appeared before her, blocking her path. It was Ayanokouji Kanon.

“Oh, Yoshino! You haven't formed a team yet?”

“Ah, not yet...”

Even if Yoshino tried to explain, it was plain that Kanon wasn't going to listen. She'd already shaken her thick hair and said:

“It can't be helped! If you're so persistent, you might even get me to be on your team—”

“Ah, Yoshino, come with me!”

“”Oh, I want to be in a group with Yoshino!”

“That's okay, I guess.”

This time, Kanon didn't get a chance to finish talking before Yoshino was surrounded on all sides by other students interested in forming a team with her.

“...”

Kanon stiffened and let out a high pitched noise. A classmate rested a hand on her shoulder to comfort her.

School is a nightmare space equivalent to the deepest pits of Hell. The cruelest thing among them are the practical subjects.

It was okay to take a million steps back. Although occasionally someone asks questions so that someone will answer them, it is possible to always pass by sitting quietly in your seat.

But for practical subjects like physical education, that won't work. Everyone has to act on their own initiative. The point is—.

“Okay everyone! Find some friends to form a group!”

If the sports teacher shouted this sentence casually, it would be a death spell for students. Particularly for students with low social skills, the lethality of this sentence could even lead to immediate death.

“Well, let's be together!”

“Um, okay...”

“...”

Natsumi stood in place, not moving, and watched as the groups formed one after another.

Since it was part of the class, Natsumi had to be grouped with the other students but how could she hope to reach the extremely difficult requirement of talking to her classmates like this? The classmates who were taking action right now were all superb and holy.

Speaking of which, it was really the teacher's negligence to leave the decision to students to judge this behavior in class. It is packed into a beautiful icing called autonomy. After all, there are students who are not good at communicating with others and should be left to the teacher to decide on groups in advance. Besides, it shouldn't be necessary to make groups for classes. It should be said that it is necessary to destroy the soul cage that is school, and that education through the internet is better than what school could hope to provide. Stand up and fight for independence! For real independence! For real freedom!

While Natsumi was immersed in thoughts of terrorism, Kotori and Yoshino, both of whom were also wearing sportswear, each waved their hands from separate directions and came towards her.

“Ah, Natsumi—”

“Natsumi!”

“...! You two...!”

At the site of them, Natsumi had the illusion of a ray of hope shooting into a dark hell.

Sure enough, the group should still be decided by the students themselves. Since it is impossible for all the students in the class to fall in love with each other, if the teacher decides the groups without permission, unfamiliar students will feel embarrassed, and a group of friends can improve efficiency.

“Ah Ah! Yoshino! Is there no one with you?”

“Kotori! Let’s play together!”

“Ah, no, that...”

“W-Wow!”

However, as the two made to approach Natsumi, they were taken away by other groups.

“...”

Natsumi stared wide eyed with her hand still outstretched despite the loss. She became silent once more and turned away.

“Is everyone divided into groups? Then let’s start practicing ball-holding... wait, why are you all alone?”

“...!”

Natsumi tried to make herself as small as possible, trying to erase herself from existence by blending into the background. However, when everyone else was split into groups, the presence of a single person alone still gave off a very striking impression. The physical education teacher waved her over.

“Ah!... my body... guaranteed...”

Natsumi originally tried to make an excuse to get out of physical education by saying that she was uncomfortable in order to escape to infirmary to rest.

Of course, her faint words didn’t reach the PE teacher’s ears. As a result, Natsumi soon found herself being stared at by the other students as she tried to avoid the teacher, who clearly didn’t know how to show mercy (it felt like the middle school had entered a national volleyball competition). It wasn’t long before tears burst out of her eyes. She was only a middle schooler, after all.

The bell rang to signal the end of the fourth lesson was noticed all throughout the school building.

Students knew now that it was time for lunch. Everyone proceeded to pull out their bentos from their school bags or bento bags and proceeded to grab a table to eat together with their friends.

Just like everyone else, Yoshino could also be found pulling a bento from her bag.

“... ♪...”

She hadn't meant to do it but she began humming a tune naturally. Yoshino remembered that eating lunch at school is one of the long-awaited times after watching high school dramas.

Of course, she wasn't dissatisfied with the usual lunch but there was something special about being able to eat lunch with friends that filled an unknown desire that she'd only recently discovered.

Moreover, it was Shido who made this lunch for her and Natsumi along with Kotori and Tohka's lunches. Yoshino had always been envious of this and now realized that two of her wishes have come true at once.

“Hm Are you in a good mood, Yoshino?”

“I'm okay...!”

Yoshino stood up with a smile in response to Yoshino's voice and planned to eat her bento with Kotori and Natsumi.

At that moment, an elegant girl appeared before her.

“Ah Yoshino! Are you by yourself? If you really insist—”

“Ah, Yoshino! Let's eat together!”

“Come, come here, Yoshino!”

“Wow! Yoshino, your lunchbox is so beautiful!”

“Oh, t-that...”

A group of schoolgirls with bento boxes rushed up from beside Kanon, and brought Yoshino to their table. After Kanon stared in surprise for a moment, she looked at Yoshino resentfully—but Yoshino still hadn't noticed!

“...”

Natsumi set her bento box on her lap, and one person ate lunch in silence.

The place where she is currently is not a classroom but rather a small space surrounded by walls. In the center was a chair-shaped appliance and on the wall was a roll of toilet paper—she was in a toilet cubicle.

Of course, Natsumi initially planned to eat in the classroom but Kotori and Yoshino were already preoccupied with their classmates as usual, so she decided that she would come to the bathroom alone.

Even if Natsumi did eat in the classroom, presumably, no one would care, but the excess of her self-awareness will fill those surrounding casual sights and voices into murderous weapons.

She had the feeling that the girls were going to say bad things about her behind her back. The one boy who glanced at her probably hated her guts now—these delusions made Natsumi's heart violent.

Furthermore, Yoshino and Kotori seemed to have fun in the classroom so it's annoying. Naturally, it goes without saying that Yoshino seemed to be having a good time and seemed to get along well with her classmates. In this case, Natsumi wasn't going to get in the way and disturb her rare lunch time. This was the best choice for everyone.

“...Huh?”

Natsumi's head was full of thoughts while she ate. She suddenly paused and stared at her chopsticks. Shido's mini hamburger steak always tasted just right, but now it tastes salty.

Just at that moment—

There was a bang just outside her door followed by a rough voice noise that made Natsumi freeze and her breath catch in her throat.

“What's with that girl!...I'm so mad! The miss is at a loss and she took special care of her and even ignored my kindness!

As soon as she walked into the toilet, Kanon exclaimed angrily. The schoolgirl with her, Koko Kojiko, shrugged helplessly.

“I don't think Yoshino is ignoring you on purpose. I think what's really going on is that you're not listening to her.”

“Shut up!”

Kanon interrupted Koko, her hands trembling with anger and her teeth gritted.

“I can’t handle this... since she’s so arrogant, I have my own considerations too.”

“W-What are you going to do?”

“Do you need to ask such things? Don’t try to make me out to be the bad guy here, but this crime is truly horrible. I will keep looking for her and keep her shadow in my heart; I’ll make sure that she never comes back to school ever again!”

“W-What... d-don’t do that!”

“Dammit! I can do this!”

After Kanon finished shouting, she briefly checked her makeup before stomping back into the corridor aggressively.

The female student roared with anger after leaving.

The single toilet door slowly creaked open gently

“...”

The girl in the toilet frowned without saying anything. She sighed at the troublesome situation.



“Ha ha ha... First of all, you must learn this trick.”

After finishing her lunch, Kanon returned to the classroom, playing with a rectangular object in her hand, a sinister smile on her face.

“...? What’s that?” Koko asked, puzzled. After Kanon picked up the rectangular object with her index and middle fingers and suddenly lifted it to meet Koko’s eyes.

“Don’t you see? It’s an eraser. An eraser.”

“I can see that it’s an eraser. I’m asking what you’re planning on doing with it.”

“Oh, does such a thing even need to be said?”

Kanon pulled a utility knife out of her pencil case and cut up the eraser into small pieces. She placed one of the blocks on the palm of her hand and flicked it with the other, hitting Koko’s head.

“Uh...?”

Koko, suddenly bombarded, tilted her head with a stunned expression while Kanon curled her arms and the corners of her mouth raised into a smile.

“How is it? This is my secret technique, <Eraser Cannon>. Thanks to God, that girl’s seat is in front of mine. After starting the class, I’ll use this to attack and distract her. Suddenly being called by the teacher and not being able to say the answer, and gradually exhausted... ha ha ha!”

“...Uh, hey, I think it will only be annoying.”

Koko responded with perplexity to Kanon’s strategy. She pursed her lips, dissatisfied.

“What, do you have a problem with that?”

“Not really, but I thought you were going to think of crueler methods...”

“Like what?”

“Huh? Like putting a pushpin in her shoes, splashing water when she goes to the toilet, tearing her textbooks, throwing her desk out of the window and saying there is no place for her, or...”

“Oh my God! What are you thinking! She’s so pitiful!”

After hearing Koko’s example, Kanon could not help but yell.

Just then, the bell rang, signaling the end of lunchtime. The students returned to their seats one after another.

“Okay, Koko. Go back to your seat too. Then we’ll see how this teaches her.”

“Okay.”

After Koko replied perfunctorily and obediently returned to her seat.

Soon afterwards, her victim, Yoshino, sat down in the seat in front of Kanon and the teacher who taught the fifth period entered the classroom. After standing, saluting, and sitting down, the class began immediately.”

“Hehehe...”

Kanon shredded an eraser behind her textbook and placed the shreds in the palm of her hand, taking aim at Yoshino’s back.

A small eraser block flew violently toward Yoshino. However, when it was about to hit the back of her head, it seemed to be blocked by an invisible wall and bounced back in Kanon’s direction.

“Ow!”

“Kanon, is there a problem?”

The unexpected development made Kanon shout in surprise. The teacher looked at her in confusion.

“Ah, no... I’m okay...”

Kanon finished saying this before trying once more with another small eraser block. The result, however, was exactly the same. When the block was about to hit Yoshino, it bounced back at her.

“...”

Over and over, she continued to launch a relentless series of attacks. Kanon ran out of patience, broke up the eraser block, and launched them all at once. However, the outcome was the same: they all bounced back and hit Kanon’s head like a snowstorm.

“...Ugh! I hate this! What the hell is going on?”

“Kanon!”

“...! Ah, I’m sorry!”

She received the teacher’s glare and Kanon could only look away while shrugging her shoulders.



“... Damn it, how could that happen just now!”

After the fifth lesson, Kanon grimaced angrily. Not only was she scolded by the teacher, but the appearance of the eraser block was also laughed at by her classmates, and several eraser pieces were stuck in her hair. She couldn’t take it out in front of everyone. It was really embarrassing.

“I don’t know... maybe a transparent pad was on the back of her chair?”

Koko’s face was next to her and showed a little annoyance. Kanon pursed her lips unpleasantly.

“Are you telling me that she realized that I would shoot her with my eraser bits?”

“Well, how would I know?”

“...Forget about it. Let’s try a different move.”

“Hmm? What are you going to do to her next?”

Koko asked, but looked uninterested. Kanon smiled slightly and pointed at the apron on her hand.

“What class do you think we have next?”

“Yes... home economics class. It seems to be that we’re making cookies today, right?”

“That’s right. I’m going to sprinkle a lot of salt in her cookie dough, and let her bite down, her face will be wrinkled with salt!”

“... Oh, so that’s it.”

Koko returned her gaze with a dumb glance for some reason. However, Kanon didn’t care and hummed cheerfully while walking into the cooking classroom.

The cooking class has gathered students who wore aprons and triangle scarves. One of the things that attracts everyone’s attention are Kotori and Yoshino.

Although she only wore a blue apron and a triangle scarf outside her uniform, her cuteness complemented her pitiful looks to create an exciting atmosphere. And even the rabbit puppet she wore on her left hand was wearing the same costume. It was so cute.



“W-Wow... she’s so cute...!”

“...Kanon?”

“I-I said nothing!”

After Kanon cleared her throat, she quickly put on the apron and triangle scarf.

—Then the bell rang, and class began.

Everyone was divided into groups and was tasked with baking cookies. Fortunately, Kanon’s group was assigned to the station next to Yoshino’s groups. It seemed that Kanon’s luck was finally turning for the better.

“...Now’s my chance!”

Kanon waited for the right moment as all the groups made their cookies. She quickly added a lot of salt to the cookie dough at Yoshino’s side and then stirred it quickly so that the salt wouldn’t be noticed. She worked fast and quickly returned to her own workstation. It took only five seconds, and the technique was so fast that it was unconscious.

“Strange...”

“Hmm? Yoshino, is something wrong?”

“No... it just feels like there is more dough...”

“Really? Isn’t it all the same dough? Leave it out and use the mold to make the shape, and then we can bake it!”

“Ah... Okay, so it’s that.”

At her team member’s urging, Yoshino started to shape the dough into the mold. Kanon squinted to observe her actions, raising the corners of her mouth to smile.

Thirty minutes later, all the groups finished making their dough and placed it in the oven. When the oven went off, the smell of cookies drifted all around the classroom.

“Oh! It tastes so delicious! Yoshino, you should try it!”

“O-Okay!”

Yoshino’s cheeks were flushed and nodded in agreement before taking one of the cookies and popping it into her mouth.

“Hehehehe...”

Kanon covered her mouth with her hand to cover the corners of her crooked mouth. But-

“Delicious...!”

“What?”

Hearing that unexpected word, Kanon stared at her in shock.

Kanon added far more salt than usual, and it is impossible to cook the finished product to the point that it could be swallowed.

However, Yoshino’s expression didn’t look like she was patient with salty tastes. What on earth is it?

“Kanon, let’s taste ours too.”

“Oh? Okay... let’s try it.”

Hearing from the same group of classmates, Kanon popped a piece of her own cookies into her mouth despite her doubts.

Then—

“It’s salty!”

She felt a strong stimulus in her mouth and wailed, jumping up on the spot. The coughing didn’t stop, and she spit it out quickly.

“Huh?! Th-this is...!”

Kanon’s face was sweating and panting—this strong taste is not wrong. Kanon added a lot of salt to the cookie dough before baking it.

“Could it be that when you put it in the oven that you accidentally swapped with Yoshino’s group? Otherwise, you can’t justify it. It’s impossible for Yoshino to do it intentionally...”

When Kanon was thinking about this problem, Koko bit her cookie and tilted her head in wonder.

“Kanon, what’s wrong with you?”

“Koko, are you all right?”

“What do you mean? This cookie is delicious.”

“What the hell is this...?”

Kanon's expression became confused and groaned in a low voice.



“—My advantage is that I will never give up!”

After school, Kanon said exaggeratedly in the empty classroom and shouted loudly.

The disadvantage is entanglement.

“I wish you could control your emotions.”

Koko said with a sigh, Kanon responded fiercely. After covering her ears, Koko looked at Kanon.

“So, what more can you do? Regardless of what you do, it will probably fail; I'd advise you to just give up now.”

“What stupid thing are you talking about! I was so humiliated, how can I quit silently and let things continue like this?!”

“No, that is entirely your own belief.”

After Koko sighed as though resigned to what was to come, “So,” she went on to say:

“What are you going to do this time?”

“Hehehe... look at that.”

Kanon said, pointing to the door of the classroom. More accurately, pointing to a wipe covered with chalk dust on the door.

That's right. It is the origin of the classroom prank and the apex of pranks.

“...That's really cliché.”

“It's cliché because it's classic enough to stay!”

“However, the school day has already ended. Students like Yoshino must have already returned home.”

“Hehehe... you're too tender. Did you forget who the duty student is today?”

“The duty student... seems to be Kotori... you don't mean...”

“That's right! If relatives are on duty, they usually help out and then go home together! Now that the two are just going to take out the trash, it should be almost time to return. Then, because the

garbage can was held in both hands, Kotori opened the door. It's Yoshino! How about it! The plan is perfect!"

"... Isn't this wishful thinking auspicious?"

"No! She will definitely do it! Because she looks kind!"

"You're praising her, aren't you..."

"Less nonsense... Ah! Hush! Don't talk! She's here!"

Footsteps came from the corridor. Kanon pulled Koko to hide behind the table.

"Sorry, Yoshino. This is all done."

"It's okay... but, Natsumi..."

"Ah she said she's okay, let's go back first... what is it?"

Yoshino approached the classroom while talking with Kotori. Kanon did her best to suppress her increasingly loud heartbeat and couldn't wait to see the moment when Yoshino opened the door.

Then, Yoshino's hand held the slightly opened door slit.

"...Yes!"

Kanon shook her fist vigorously.

However—

"What...?"

A squeaking noise was heard in the throat.

Alas, that's not surprising. The door was open, but the wiper clipped above the door did not fall off, as if double-sided tape had been applied to the edges.

"How, why...?"

Kanon's words didn't fall. The next moment, the ceiling dropped a large metal basin and hit her on the head.

"Ow!"

The sudden blow made Kanon scream and collapse to the ground. Yoshino and Kotori were surprised, looking down at Kanon.

“Yeah! Uh, Kanon...?”

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“Oh! Ah... uh, I...”

Kanon’s voice was incoherent, so Yoshino worriedly stretched out her hand to help her back to her feet.

“Are you all right?” But—

“...Yoshino, there is no need to help her up.”

A murmur came at this time, and then the door of the broom closet in the corner of the classroom flew open.

“Natsumi!”

As Natsumi emerged from the broom closet, Yoshino’s eyes widened in surprise. Kanon, however, shook her shoulders timidly.

“AAAAHHH! Mop Monster!”

“Who’re you calling a mop monster?!”

Natsumi couldn’t help but shout... then she simply started to comb her messy hair with her hands.

After a while, Kotori tilted her head with a puzzled look.

“Let’s just leave her alone... You don’t need to help her up. What do you mean by that?”

“Exactly what I said. She put a chalkboard wiper on the door and had every intention of hitting Yoshino with that basin.”

“...!”

Natsumi glared at Kanon through narrowed eyes, and Kanon shook her shoulders again.

“Kanon...?”

“Really?” Yoshino asked, stunned.

“... Yeah. It’s not just that. She was planning to shoot you with bits of eraser and tried to add salt to your cookies in the cooking practice class.”

“W-What...”

After listening to Natsumi’s explanation, Kanon’s expression was stunned.

Rather than shock at the accusations, it seems to have other meanings. As if confirming this inference, Kanon shivered and said:

“How did you figure it out?”

“...Hmph.”

Natsumi simply sighed in response to Kanon’s panicked sounds. She seemed to be aware of everything, and stared at Natsumi in confusion.

That’s right. As a Spirit, Natsumi had the power of <Haniel> and could easily use it to form an invisible wall, change the taste of biscuits, and create metal traps connected with the opening and closing of a door. It was safe to say that Kanon couldn’t understand this principle.

“H-How is it possible...I didn’t leave any clues! I came up with all of my ideas on a whim! There’s no way you could know what I’m thinking!” said Kanon anxiously.

Natsumi’s face wrinkled with a displeased expression:

“Of course I know what you’re thinking, because you and I think in exactly the same way!”

Kanon leaned back in surprise.

Admittedly, Natsumi wasn’t 100% accurate in her prediction of Kanon’s tricks. However, she used every trick possible to keep track of a person—provided that Kanon’s actions didn’t become too extreme. It wasn’t hard for Natsumi’s Angel <Haniel>, which can transform anything at will.

Plus—one more thing that was discovered after observing Kanon. Natsumi fell like a stone and suddenly stretched out her finger at Kanon.

“Have you ever been treated this way before?”

“...! Y-you! What are you talking about...?”

After Natsumi finished talking, Kanon’s eyes moved about in a very obvious way and her voice seemed to change.

She started shivering a little bit, then—

“A-Ah! AAAAHHHH!” Tears appeared in Kanon’s eyes and she bowed her head weakly.

“Kanon...!”

“Ahhhhhhh... you made someone cry!”

“It’s my fault, my fault...!”

She sobbed by Natsumi’s side. Although Natsumi knew that she didn’t need to panic, she nonetheless answered with some anxiety.

Kanon shivered on her shoulders and twitched like a mosquito:

“It’s just, it’s not... it’s because other people can’t keep up with me... but... what the hell... everyone despises me...”

The floor showed traces of tears, and Kanon muttered resentfully.

“...Ugh”

When she saw the symptoms, she scratched her head and sighed.

Kanon’s actions are definitely not appreciated... Sadly, Natsumi seemed to have realized her true intentions.

After sighing again, Natsumi held Kanon’s gaze.

“... I don’t know what your problems are, but you have to pay for what you planned to do to Yoshino.”

Then she said so, pulling Kanon semi-forcefully. The slumped Kanon let out a pitiful squeak before whimpering... She was scared about what Natsumi might do to her.

“N-Natsumi, I really don’t care...”

“...No, you have to finish what you started...Okay, stand up. Look her in the eye and apologize to Yoshino.”

“W-Why do I have to do this?”

“...”

Natsumi silently struck Kanon in the side and she twisted her body while shrieking.

“I’m sorry...”

“Very good. Next, stretch out your right hand.”

“L-like this...?”

“Yeah. Now, repeat after me: ‘Please be my friend.’”

“Please be my friend... uh-oh!”

Kanon, like a puppet, obeyed everything Natsumi said and her eyes widened in surprise.

Alas, it was too late. Because her hand stretched out ahead was already taken up by Yoshino who was aware of the situation.

“Okay... I’ll ask you to please take good care of me.”

Yoshino smiled once she finished speaking. Her lovely smile made Kanon flush in embarrassment.

“W-Why...?”

Yoshino blushed and glanced at Natsumi. Natsumi snorted coldly and looked away from the pair of them.

“...Didn’t I say it before? Your way of thinking is very similar to how I think. I wanted people to notice me, so I deliberately provoked them. It’s stupid.”

“A-ah!” Kanon sounded blank. After Natsumi turned away, she waved dismissively.

“There’s incurable scum in the world, and I don’t really understand your feelings, but Yoshino is very nice and will pay attention to you, so you have to be honest sometimes. That way, you two can be friends and get along well. Anyway, I’m going back.”

...Natsumi felt a little too kind at that moment and coupled with the honesty of her words that haven’t yet been put into practice, she still had lessons that she could teach to others. But sometimes, it doesn’t matter. As those thoughts flowed through her head, she made her way to the classroom door.

Just then—

“W-Wait!”

When Natsumi was about to leave in spectacular fashion, Kanon’s voice came from behind her. She quickly walked towards Natsumi.

“...What is it? Are you looking for a fight?” Natsumi frowned, clenching her fists into a fighting pose. However, Kanon held out her right hand unexpectedly and said with determination:

“Please be my friend...!”

“...What?”

When she heard those unexpected words from Kanon’s mouth, Natsumi was stunned. But from the earnest look on Kanon’s face, she didn’t seem to be messing around. The bewildered Natsumi looked to Kotori and Yoshino for help.

However, the two of them smiled happily. Kotori shrugged and laughed:

“Don’t you two... think in similar ways?”

“Hmmm...”

Natsumi didn’t know what to say to that, and instead slowly turned her gaze back to Kanon. With a nervous voice, she answered:

“... That, then... uh... please take care of me.”

“...! O-Okay!”

Kanon’s smile filled with joy.

Yoshino, Kotori, and the female student with Kanon saw this and clapped their hands with a little helpless expression.



“I’m back!”

Kotori’s voice filled the house along with the sound of the door opening.

“Welcome back!”

Shido responded as he prepared dinner. Soon after, three young girls in junior high uniforms came into the living room: first was Kotori, his younger sister, and then, Yoshino and Natsumi, who had gone with her to experience school life.

“Oh, you three. It’s very late.”

Shido glanced at the clock on the wall. It was already past 6 o’clock in the evening. For Kotori who doesn’t participate in any after school activities, she came back a lot later than usual.

“Well, we went to the cafe after school and lost track of time there.”

“So that’s how it is.”

Shido nodded gently as he answered.

Although she often met up with Yoshino and Natsumi, it was quite a new experience for them to come home from the same school together. Perhaps they wanted to enjoy being outside a little bit longer.

“So how was school today?”

Shido wiped his hands with his apron as he asked the question. Yoshino’s eyes lit up as she smiled brightly at him.

“It was... very fun! The bento that you made for me was delicious! Ah, this is a cookie I made for you! And, well, I want to go to school more...!”

“Oh, thank you—is that right? That’s good.”

Listening to Yoshino laugh openly, Shido soon found himself mimicking her. Shido smiled as he turned to Natsumi.

“What about you, Natsumi?”

“...As I thought, it’s terrible and not worth it at all.”

“Ahaha... that’s really—”

Shido noticed something a little peculiar. Natsumi complained and complained, but her expression was a little different from usual.

“Natsumi, did something good happen to you?”

“...! W-What? No!”

Natsumi reacted fiercely to Shido’s words.

“But how should I say this? ...It was okay? If Yoshino said that she still wanted to go to school, it would not be bad if I went along with her.”

“Hmm... so it’s like that.”

Although it is not clear what happened... Shido guessed that the atmosphere would be more lively than usual when eating dinner tonight.

Kurumi Valentine

“——Ufufu, fufu.”

Tokisaki Kurumi smiled while in a good mood, looking up at the display shelf for ingredients for sweets.

With porcelain skin and glossy black hair, she was a lovely girl wearing a black coat over her slender limbs.

Well, her left eye was ticking regularly, but that alone was an indication of her somewhat extraordinary experiences.

“Now then, what are you going to do?”

Kurumi took delight in muttering to herself as she lined up the chocolates in order by hand.

Kurumi was currently working at a confectionary material store on the main street of Tengu City. Beginning from melting a block of chocolate, she would use a chocolate pen with granulated sugar to write on a message plate. Moreover, colored wrapping paper would be used to compartmentalize everything into a confined space.

That should do it. Today is February 11th. It was three days before St. Valentine’s Day, a day of celebration for girls in love.

Of course, Kurumi’s goal here was also materials for handmade chocolate. Imagining the perfect shape for chocolates in her head, she threw everything she needed into the shopping basket.

Despite this, Kurumi was neither intending to give a sweet love confession or distribute obligation chocolate.

“——Kihhi, hihi”

While grabbing the dark chocolate with high cacao content, Kurumi raised the corners of her mouth with a smile.

“Look forward to it, Shido-san.”

Yes, this was all for the sake of turning the young man with the power to seal reiryoku, Itsuka Shido, into her captive of lust just through her wiles.

Therefore, Kurumi’s flawless plan required obtaining handmade chocolate materials at the confectionary store.

Her words for dialogue were a spear to the chest.

The touch of her fingertips was the edge of a blade.

And this chocolate was a bomb to shatter the walls of Shido's mind into fine dust.

Every method for the sake of making Shido fall in love.

...By no means was this to make Shido pleased, or conceivably the reason being to earn his praise.

“...Ara?”

Suddenly, Kurumi's eyebrows twitched as she turned behind.

For some reason, it felt like a gaze was watching her.

However, there was no such figure behind her.

Rather than behind her it was only from the walls, floor, and Kurumi's own shadow.

“Ah...”

Kurumi, who had a faint idea of the owner of that gaze, slightly shrugged her shoulders as she went back to shopping for ingredients for the chocolate.



“Kusukusukusu.”

“Kusukusukusu.”

Countless laughter resounded inside the dark, obscure shadows.

Inside the shadows—that expression was neither a metaphor nor exaggeration.

It wasn't a dimly lit place or a location with no one present. Within the black vortex on every crevice on the walls and floor, there were several girls breathing.

Innumerable—girls with the same face.

“Ara, ara, what are you doing, *me*?”

Noticing the laughter of that girl—one of the *Kurumi* raised such a question. Then, another *Kurumi* with the same face replied while nodding.

Yes, everyone in the shadow was Kurumi. By manipulating the Angel of time <Zafkiel>,

Tokisaki Kurumi's past forms could be revived as a clone.

"Ah, *me*. Just peeked out of the shadow a little."

"*Me*, also went out to look?"

"What happened outside?"

"Yes, yes, it appears that *me* is buying chocolate ingredients."

"Ara, ara."

While saying that, a *Kurumi* placed her hand on her chin and peered out to look at the outside world just like the other *Kurumi*.

"I see it's a gift for Shido-san."

"Yes, yes. *Me* certainly has quite the cheerful look."

"Ufufu, looking at this makes myself feel embarrassed."

While watching Kurumi act this way, all of the clones laughed.

Yes, the appearance of Kurumi seen from the shadows certainly did look more blissful than usual.

However, while watching this scene, one of the clones raised her voice after recalling something.

"But, *me* seems to say that it is only a means to make Shido-san fall in love."

"Yes, that was said."

"There is no other meaning behind this, that point was always emphasized like that."

As one clone said that, the other clones stood up in astonishment.

"Eh!"

"Is that true?"

"That's a little suspicious."

"Ah, she's singing. Singing."

"The person in question doesn't seem to have noticed it herself yet."

"The song is Valentine's Kiss. The song selection seems a bit old."

As they each shared their opinions, *Kurumi* laughed.

Apart from this, it wasn't as if they were treating *Kurumi* like an idiot. After all, the real *Kurumi* was the equivalent to their own future. Rather, it would be better to say they were watching with a smile.

“But—”

“A bit enviable, of *me*.”

“Yes, yes, certainly.”

“I also want to give a gift to Shido-san.”

“But we ought to be aware...acting without permission is not allowed.”

“But.”

“No.”

“But.”

“But.”

Despite all of them being *Kurumi*, there were subtle differences in thinking and values depending on the age they were created from. Although all of them shared the same overall goal, not everyone would give the same reply.

In the shadows, the voices coming from *Kurumi* echoed several times over.



“—Now, preparations are all set.”

The night of February 13th. At one of her various locations in the city.

Kurumi changed into her underwear, while placing her hand on her waist she made a final inspection for the upcoming final battle.

“Uniform, check. Winter gear, check. Shoes, check. Underwear—

“Fufu.”

Kurumi made a pose in front of the dressing mirror and nodded lightly.

Sensual underwear covered enchanting snow white skin. Although it was a bit self-proclaimed,

there was no man whose heart wouldn't skip a beat seeing this.

“Good. Now then——”

As Kurumi abruptly raised the corners of her lips, she turned her body to point to a decorated box on her desk.

“Chocolate, all set.”

Naturally, the taste of the chocolate was self-explanatory, but Kurumi was also quite confident that the wrapping was finely done as well. Kurumi smiled in satisfaction as she carefully placed the box into a paper bag.

And then——

“...Ara?”

Unexpectedly, Kurumi slanted her head.

The shadow on the floor suddenly distorted as a girl with the same face as Kurumi crawled out from there.

Moreover, the Astral Dress covering her body was in ruins. She was clutching her own shoulders, gasping with a painful look. Seeing that unusual appearance, Kurumi couldn't help but purse her brow.

“Ha...ha...n-not good, *me*.”

“What on earth happened? Don't tell me that something happened to Shido-san——”

As Kurumi asked that, the clone shook her head.

“*W-We* have rebelled...!”

“...Ha?”

Hearing those unexpected words, Kurumi's face was left utterly baffled.

Rebellion. Of course, she knew the meaning behind that word. But when it came to that word, she would never associate it with her personal clone vanguard that shared the same mentality.

Certainly, the clones were a part of Kurumi's past history. Since they are taken from distinct time periods, there may or may not be some guileless individuals from a so-called rebellious phase.

However, Kurumi's absolute goal has never once been shaken. Therefore, even with individual differences between clones, the common thought process should remain the same.

But, the clone raised her head, looking at Kurumi with a serious look as she continued explaining.

“At first, it was just a little quarrel. But then the radical *we* began to rise.”

“Radical *we*?”

Hearing those all too familiar words, Kurumi couldn’t help but repeat those words just like a parrot.

The clone continued to speak in a fervent tone.

“Even though from the beginning the moderate *we* tried frantically to stop them...”

“Moderate *we*?”

“From a certain perspective, there was a dispute between the new Tokisaki faction and the old Tokisaki faction. Taking advantage of that opportunity, the *me* who was the representative of the principle Kurumi doctrine staged an uprising. No...thinking about it now, it may have all gone according to the grand plan depicted by *me*.”

“...I’m not quite sure, anyway what happened?”

As Kurumi said while scratching her cheek, the clone lightly nodded her head as she continued to speak.

“There is a group of *me* who have formed an alliance to give Shido-san a gift and ran out of the shadow...”

“...?! Please inform me of this earlier!”

When hearing what the clone had said, Kurumi widened her eyes as her voice turned inside out.

Although it wasn’t easy to understand abstract concepts like rebellion, radical, and moderation, this was the most important matter.

The clones doing something unnecessary could hinder Kurumi’s goal—and above all else.

“The past *me* sending a gift to Shido-san...? Y-you’ve got to be kidding...!”

Kurumi’s face turned pale as she immediately snapped her fingers.

In an instant, the shadows clung onto Kurumi’s body, forming a red and black dress. Astral Dress, the absolute armor fortress for a Spirit.

“This has to be immediately stopped now...! How many offenders are there?!”

“Yes, although most of the radicals have been stopped by us, four culprits have taken advantage of this opportunity...”

“So there are four of them. I understand. —Please assign the remaining *me* to the next task.”

“Could it be that you are intending to go alone? The whereabouts of *me* are still unknown...”

The clone expressed her concerns as Kurumi gave out her instructions.

Kurumi turned her body around as she huffed from her nose.

“I can’t afford to spare more people. —Besides, who do you think I am? Aren’t I the final form for all of *me*? The thoughts of *me* are as clear as the things held in the palm of my hand.”

As Kurumi spoke, she made a small jump at that spot, diving into the shadows.



—Moonlight shined through the window, filling the classroom with a fantasy-like light.

The time was 2:00 AM. In the empty school, the sound of small footsteps was heard.

It was neither a teacher on night duty nor a student who sneaked back into school to grab something that was forgotten. —It was the Spirit, *Tokisaki Kurumi*.

“Ufufu, fufu.”

Kurumi smiled a little, narrowing her eyes at this commonplace romantic scene as she slowly walked into the classroom.

Kurumi was currently in classroom 204 of Raizen High School.

A class *Kurumi* once transferred into and where Itsuka Shido was enrolled.

Walking in tandem with the neatly arranged desks, *Kurumi* stopped at a particular desk.

“If I’m not mistaken...it should be here.”

While saying so, she raised the corners of her lips. —Yes, if the memory of *Kurumi* serves, here should be Shido’s seat.

“Fufu...”

Kurumi slowly took out a beautifully wrapped case from a paper bag. —It was chocolate.

And then, she hid it within Shido’s desk.

So the next morning, when Shido came to school, he would find this. Together along with a mysterious message—

But just at that moment.

“—That’s far enough, *me*.”

Accompanied by a familiar voice, a shadow appeared in the vision of *Kurumi*.

“Wha...!”

Confronted by that sudden occurrence, *Kurumi* twitched her shoulders as she turned to the direction of that voice.

Standing there was the real *Kurumi*, who crossed her arms with the moon appearing behind her.

“...Sure enough, you’ve come here.”

Kurumi, who had discovered one of the culprits quite early, tensed her eyebrows in displeasure.

The first location to arrive would be classroom 204. It appeared that she was trying to hide chocolates in Shido's desk.

"Ara, ara...if it isn't *me*. What are you doing here at this hour?"

The Kurumi who was caught at the scene of the crime didn't appear to be the slightest shaken as she feigned being calm.

Even so, this wasn't entirely unsurprising. After all, it was her old self standing before her. For Kurumi, she was inadvertently self-aware of this state of mind. Simply put, she would consider being in a flustered state to be more detestable.

However, criticizing her for coming out now would come off as too boorish. ...In any case, it would even feel a bit uncomfortable for her. Kurumi sighed as she half closed her eyes.

"Don't play dumb, *me*. I've already heard the story. —Haven't you been recklessly and excessively behaving at your own convenience?"

While saying this, Kurumi looked on at the culprit illuminated by the moonlight.

Needless to say, the other party was a clone and had an identical face to Kurumi. But her outfit was slightly different from the current Kurumi.

It was a Gothic Lolita dress with a black and white basis. Rather than tying up her hair, her head was decorated with an ornament resembling a rose.

Moreover, the biggest feature was the left eye. She was wearing a medical eyepatch to hide the clock-piece on that eye.

...A few years ago, there was a time she was tired of being dressed the same as her clones and made a conscious effort to differentiate her image. The Gothic Lolita Dress from this eyepatch Kurumi must be from around five years ago.

Nowadays, she realized that looking identical to her clones could help in deceiving the eyes of the enemy. But still, this Kurumi represented her brief phase of blowing up her self-individuality.

In that regard, the existence of this eyepatch Kurumi could be considered as Kurumi's natural enemy. After all, everybody has bitter memories of the past...but this so-called black history has manifested in the form of a person. Just thinking about it was bad for her mental health.

Eyepatch Kurumi likely realized that it was futile to keep dodging the topic. She vented out a sigh, shrugging her shoulders while pulling out the box she was trying to hide in Shido's desk.

“This isn’t being crafty at all, *me*. We just wanted to give Shido-san a gift.”

Eyepatch Kurumi spoke while not in the slightest afraid. Even so, Kurumi still felt anxious at her reply.

“Tokisaki Kurumi, you are the me of that era. You are just a reproduction of my past. Please don’t hinder my plan.”

“It’s because there was no one in my time period like Shido-san. Besides, what’s wrong with adding a few more gifts?”

“It• is•a•huge•problem...!”

Hearing what eyepatch Kurumi had said, Kurumi raised her voice without bothering to conceal her anger.

Then, with that momentum, she hastily took a step forward to snatch the box away from eyepatch Kurumi.

“Kya, what are you doing?!”

Eyepatch Kurumi sent out a look of criticism. However, Kurumi didn’t pay attention to that as she turned her attention to the box.

“My past aesthetics is whom I’m most distrustful of! What would be done if you send something strange that Shido-san hates!”

“How rude to call it something strange. It’s just plain chocolate.”

Eyepatch Kurumi spoke while pouting.

As it turned out, she wasn’t lying. However, the problem was not there. Kurumi lowered her eyes to the card stuck on the box.

“...What is this?”

With a gloomy expression, Kurumi carefully scrutinized.

It was a black card the size of a business card. However, there was no information or contact info on it. Instead there was a stylish font (a typeface likely to be displayed on a screen when a mysterious person was talking through a communication device) with only the letter K printed.

It was just like the calling card of a phantom thief.

—Your heart, I’ve come to accept it...how utterly bothersome! Kurumi internalized the role of a

tsukkomi in her thoughts.

Looking at each constituent factor individually, it might come off as cool. But when these elements are mixed together layer by layer, it was an unbearable sight to behold.

However, eyepatch Kurumi stared blankly while tilting her head.

“Don’t you feel that it is cool?”

“It’s not cool at all...! It’s a hundred steps back, the chocolate itself was good enough, why would you attach something like this!”

“Because he wouldn’t even know who sent this...ha!”

As she said that, eyepatch Kurumi widened her eye as if noticing something.

“I-I see...that is certainly true.”

Suddenly, her hand began to tremble. Seeing her in this state, Kurumi finally breathed out a sigh.

“Do you finally understand now?”

“Yes...if there is only a K, there is the possibility of it being mistaken as a gift from Kaguya- san or Kotori-san, right? As expected, I need to add a clock symbol...”

“That’s not it at all aaaaaaaaah!”

Kurumi screamed as she slammed against the floor with her foot.

From there, the shadows spread outward, grabbing onto eyepatch Kurumi’s feet.

“Kyaah!”

Eyepatch Kurumi let out a scream—but as soon as she quickly understood the situation, her expression turned fearless with cold sweat dripping down her cheeks.

“Regretfully...it seems that this is as far as I can go. —But, I am only the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings of Kurumi. I’m looking forward to how you confront the three remaining *me*! Kihihihi! Kihihihihihhi—”

Eyepatch Kurumi continued to speak until being forcefully dragged into the shadow.

“...No, what are the Four Heavenly Kings of Kurumi?”

Kurumi felt a little dizzy as she dived into the shadows to catch the next culprit.



After that, Kurumi departed for the main entrance of the High School.

Although it wasn't clear which other generation of Kurumi had instigated the revolt, as long as it was her old self, she felt the opportunity of putting chocolate in his shoe drawer.

“...Sure enough, I was right.”

There was a Kurumi closely peeking into Shido's shoe cupboard. The original could only sigh at this sight.

Here, as expected, one of the clones was putting chocolate into a shoe cupboard.

Despite it being gratifying for things to go as expected, when considering it closer this meant she was reading their thoughts as if it were her own. Kurumi felt slightly depressed at the prospects of this.

But in any case, she couldn't let this clone proceed any farther. While making loud footsteps, Kurumi leaped towards that spot.

“Stop right there, *me!*”

“...! Wha...!”

Seeing Kurumi appear, the clone faintly wrinkled her brow as she turned to the direction of the real Kurumi.

“...”

Just from looking at her appearance, Kurumi felt a semi-automatic spasm strike her cheeks.

As in the case of the Kurumi earlier, she was dressed differently than a normal clone. She was wearing a Gothic punk-style with bandages covering her entire body. Her right hand, left foot, and of course left eye were also covered in bandages.

Although similar to the previous Kurumi, the direction of this person was even more twisted. Kurumi felt a mysterious headache just looking at her.

And then bandage Kurumi tried to keep calm while opening her mouth.

“Ara, ara...if it isn't *me*. At such a time—”

“Aah, those words have already been spoken, so you can spare the effort. You are the second one. That should give you enough of an idea.”

As Kurumi turned her face away after speaking, bandage Kurumi let out a “boo” sound as she pouted her lips to complain.

“Eh, that’s too unfair. I would also like to deliver to an exceptionally strong person. Taking upon that challenge is restorative after fighting the enemy.”

“...What are you trying to say?”

Kurumi sighed and then continued speaking while pointing to the bag that bandage Kurumi was holding.

“Compared to that, if you give that box to Shido-san, various problems are likely to occur. Let me collect it right now.”

“That is tyranny! Why on earth would delivering this gift cause problems?!”

Bandage Kurumi let loose her complaints. However, Kurumi was without the slightest shred of sympathy as she glared at the gift with her eyes half-closed.

“...Say, why did you use English newspapers for wrapping in the first place?”

“Is it not quite stylish?”

“...So why is a cross-shaped ribbon wrapped around it?”

“Is it not quite stylish?”

“...So why are there bloodstains everywhere on the wrapping paper?”

“Is it not quite stylish?”

Bandage Kurumi replied instantly without taking time to think. Apparently, it seemed she actually thought so from the bottom of her heart. Kurumi placed her hand against her forehead, letting out a small groan from the dizziness.

“Do you regard this as fine, *me*? Although the packaging is indeed quite surprising, only a selective group of unusual people would choose this option.”

“Eh, is that right?”

“Yes, the bloodstains are especially undignified. Even if there is ordinary chocolate inside, most people would feel uneasy about what was placed inside. Wouldn’t this be thrown out without even looking inside?”

So, apparently the bloodstain wasn’t a print, but an actual stain on the wrapper. Although she wasn’t sure if it was real blood, anyone would get suspicious if they discovered this in the shoe

drawer. To tell the truth, this creepy appearance gave the impression of stuffing the dead body of a small animal inside rather than chocolate.

After listening to what Kurumi had said, bandage Kurumi rounded her eyes in astonishment.

“How could this be! I have not put anything dangerous inside. It is just chocolate——”

“Like I said, even if there is something ordinary inside this package...”

“——and simply paired together with a human skull ring.”

“Don’t add something so unnecessary aaaaah!”

As Kurumi screamed, just as before, the shadow on the floor expanded and entangled bandage Kurumi’s legs.

“What——hey!”

Bandage Kurumi let out a sorrowful scream as she was sucked into the shadow.

It was then that the box containing her gift slipped from her hands and rolled onto the floor.

Looking at it with a glance, Kurumi slowly bent her knees as she picked up the box.

“...Ara?”

It was then that she discovered a part that was hidden in a blind spot beforehand.

There was a card attached to the ribbon.

“...”

Taking it out, it read the words *Welcome to the hell!* drawn in blood-soaked letters.

“...”

Kurumi shuddered from every fiber of her being as she threw the box into the shadows.



“...In any case, this is halfway there.”

After capturing two clones, Kurumi left the school as she advanced forward by swimming inside her shadow.

...Despite not even thirty minutes passing in time, for some reason she felt unbearably weary. Thinking of this, Kurumi couldn’t help but sigh greatly.

“Ara, ara, fatigue must have struck, *me*.”

“Don’t overdo it. Why don’t you take a break for today?”

The two clones tried to offer words of comfort to Kurumi.

However, Kurumi was unable to feel at ease from those words.

But that was of course natural. After all, the ones talking to her now were the eyepatch and bandage Kurumi that were just caught beforehand.

Naturally, in order to prevent them from causing another disturbance, their hands and feet were tied up. But since their mouths were still free, they still tried to incessantly hinder Kurumi’s movements.

Kurumi, with great trouble to avoid looking directly at the two, glared at them.

“If you wish me to be comfortable, how about revealing the locations of the remaining two? That way I can soon fall asleep.”

“While saying that, Kurumi let out a long sigh.

Then, after eyepatch and bandage Kurumi exchanged glances for a brief moment, they gave a slight nod as they began to open their mouths to speak in turn.

“If memory serves correctly, the third *me* was searching for a French pastry chef to make the perfect chocolate.”

“Ah, ah, that’s true. I remember that the fourth *me* said about going to Trinidad and Tobago in order to gather high quality cacao beans.”

Both of them spoke in a serious manner. ...Of course, it was a lie. It was obvious that they were trying to shelter the remaining two clones.

Kurumi released a weary sigh once again before replying to those two.

“Yes, thank you for that precious information. ...Then next I will investigate the road between the school and Shido-san’s house.”

“Giku.”

“Wow.”

As Kurumi said that, eyepatch and bandage Kurumi faintly trembled from their shoulders. ...This response made their attempts at concealment all the more conspicuous.

Sure enough, the next location appeared to be there.

Well, that would be a reasonable place. Based on the two major points so far being the school classroom and shoe drawer, the next should most likely be the street that Shido always passed through.

But she didn't have a clue about any specifically designated points other than a rough outline. Kurumi rushed out from the shadows of the night, carefully exploring her surroundings.

Shortly afterwards—

“...?!”

After walking for a bit, Kurumi's feet came to stop as the shudders traveled up to her shoulders.

The reason was extremely simple. In the middle of the road, there was a huge box about 1 meter in length.

Not only that, it wasn't an ordinary box. The entire surface was decorated with colorful rhinestones that glistened brightly when exposed to the streetlights. The ribbon on the lid was made a lace simply for the purpose of being flashy.

“...”

Kurumi had a suspicious look on her face as she bent her knees to draw her ears closer to the box.

“—Fufufufufufufufufu♪”

Then, a familiar voice was heard through the box.

“...Thud.”

Kurumi stood up, raising her right leg to kick the box open.

“It hurts?! I say!”

The lid of the gorgeous box fell open as one of the clones rolled out from the inside.

The clone crouched down while pressing the severe bruise on her head. After a few seconds, she turned to deliver a resentful look to Kurumi.

“W-what are you doing...!”

“That's my line.”

Kurumi sharpened the intensity of her glare at the clone.

This individual was different from even the previous eyepatch and bandage Kurumi. After all, her clothes weren't black. She wore a frilly white dress, a sleek hood over her head and an overtly cute heart-shaped eyepatch.

Yes, it goes without saying that this was the sweet Lolita fashion. Once upon a time, for a brief moment, Kurumi fell into that delusive fashion style and this time period had been accurately reproduced as a clone.

However, after seeing eyepatch and bandage Kurumi already, Kurumi had predicted the appearance of this version. Kurumi breathed out a melancholic sigh as she turned to look at the box she just kicked over.

“...What is this box?”

As Kurumi inquired in a disgusted tone, sweet Lolita Kurumi proudly flaunted her chest.

“What are you saying? Naturally, it is *me* having decided on a present!”

Sweet Lolita Kurumi confidently spoke. Kurumi pressed her hand against her forehead to suppress the dizziness.

“...So you were inside there?”

“Yes, yes. Everything is fine except for being a little cold.”

“...Could it be you are intending to stay here until Shido-san passes by?”

“Of course not. It is a present. —Ah, there is chocolate as well, so please rest assured.”

“...”

Kurumi's sullen expression sank into silence. There were so many chances to play the role of the tsukkomi that she didn't know what to say anymore.



But sweet Lolita Kurumi didn't seem to notice this as she lifted up the fallen box as if to proudly boast the display to Kurumi.

“Please take a look, much labor was spent on this portion of the cover. It took quite a while to make everything glitter. Ah, there's also this side portion. I deliberately painted a cat pattern. And over here...”

Sweet Lolita Kurumi eloquently explained her work.

Kurumi sweetly smiled, extending her right hand forward. A pistol flew out from the shadows and landed on her hand.

“<Zafkiel>——”

“Hey! Please wait!”

Kurumi raised the pistol as sweet Lolita Kurumi screamed in a hurry.

“Here, please look here! As soon as you open the lid, you can see the name ‘Kurumi♡’ written on the back with red rhinestones! This will surely make Shido-san's heartbeat race!”

“The Fourth Bullet <Dalet>♡”

Kurumi smiled softly while pulling the trigger.

One of the abilities of the Angel that manipulated time <Zafkiel>, the Fourth Bullet <Dalet> which rerolled time struck the box. Sweet Lolita Kurumi's masterpiece changed back into various materials in a flash.

“Kyaaaaaaaaah! My five hours and forty-five minutes!”

Sweet Lolita Kurumi screamed as she sorrowfully watched the rhinestones scatter around.

However, Kurumi completely ignored the sight in front of her as she spread out her shadow from the ground to completely swallow sweet Lolita Kurumi and the decorative materials.

“Wasn't the glistening sparkle beautiful aaaaaah?!”

Sweet Lolita Kurumi raised a strange cry before being sucked into the shadows.

At that moment.

“...Ara?”

Kurumi found a small box that fell on the street. A stuffed black cat toy holding onto a box overly decorated with frill and lace materials. Presumably, this was the box of chocolates

prepared by sweet Lolita Kurumi.

Kurumi sighed as she threw the box into the shadows where sweet Lolita Kurumi had disappeared into.

“So...finally there’s only one more left.”

Yes, certainly there were four culprits that had fled. Eyepatch Kurumi had also inexplicably said the words the Four Heavenly Kings of Kurumi.

However, with eyepatch, bandage, and sweet Lolita Kurumi, it was only *dense* individuals during Kurumi’s travels that had revolted. When considering the last individual of herself, Kurumi felt a little uneasy.

“Well, even so these worries are in vain.”

While scratching her head, Kurumi racked her brain for ideas.

“One more person, if it is a place where you can surely give a present to Shido-san...”

Kurumi placed her hand against her chin, raising her face further up.



“———— Ufufu.”

The sound of such small laughter was heard in the quiet room.

That was to be expected. The time was already around 3:00 AM. People in this room had already entered a dream-like state.

Kurumi peeked out and examined the situation before emerging from the shadows.

In terms of size, the space was around 6 six tatami mats. On the wooden floor, there was furniture such as a desk and a bookshelf and a uniform was hung on the wall.

And on a bed in the corner of the room, the owner of this room was sleeping quietly.

That’s right. In order to deliver chocolate to Shido, the final *Kurumi* made the choice—of none other than *Shido’s room*.

Certainly, it was possible to deliver the chocolate to the classroom desk or Shido’s shoe drawer or home mailbox.

But from the perspective of favorability, there was no location that could beat here. After all, Shido was already here. As long as she delivers the chocolates to his pillow just like Santa Claus,

it'll be noticed as soon as he gets up in the morning.

Moreover, this came with the benefit of being noticed by Shido a step earlier than even Kotori who lived in the same household.

And also——

“Ufufu, fufu.”

Kurumi smiled happily as she walked gently towards the bed.

Of course, this was to place the chocolate by his bedside——but at the same time there was the useful opportunity of watching Shido's sleeping face a little.

Kurumi reached out her hand to the bed while thinking that.

But, at the very next moment.

“Kihi?!”

A hand suddenly protruded out from the bedsheets, tightly clutching her wrist. *Kurumi* involuntarily let out her voice.

For a moment, she thought she had been discovered by Shido——but that wasn't it. It was clearly not a man's hand that had grabbed *Kurumi's* wrist just now. The skin was white and slender, as if looking familiar——

“——Caught you, *me*.”

As *Kurumi* widened her eyes in panic, the real *Kurumi* revealed herself from the shadows of the bedsheets.

Kurumi slowly crawled out while grabbing onto *Kurumi's* wrist.

Yes, *Kurumi* had expected without a doubt that the final clone would be here to sneak beside Shido's bedsheets.

“You're the last one, *me*.”

“Ku——”

As *Kurumi* said that, the clone used all of her strength to fling off *Kurumi's* grip and retreat a step back.

The moonlight slipping through the window made it possible to see the appearance of this clone.

“...”

Gazing at the appearance of this clone, Kurumi couldn't help but tremble.

But that was unavoidable since, just like the previous three, this clone was dressed differently than the norm.

A gorgeous kimono with a floral pattern drawn on a black background, an obi sash worn as a corset, and frills peering out through spacious cuffs—and finally the pattern of the eyepatch covering her left eye was just like the sheath of the swordsmen Yagyū Jūbei.

Yes, in front of Kurumi right now was a Japanese gothic Lolita, an individual dressed in the Japanese Goth style.

“...Ah, ah—...”

Kurumi placed her hand against her forehead, while groaning as if recalling the past.

...Speaking of which, there was a phase where she indeed dressed this way.

How to describe it, although Kurumi's original preference was Gothic Lolita, there was a certain time she thought that Japanese style clothes were also exquisite. Investigating the names of various swords, using old fonts meaninglessly, indulging in romance of the Taisho era and mimicking dresses from that time period...who out there didn't have a brief phase like this? Like this, Kurumi subconsciously tried to find an excuse for herself.

“What's with that reaction?”

Japanese gothic Kurumi raised her eyebrow in suspicion of Kurumi's response. Kurumi powerlessly smiled as she lifted up her face.

“...Nothing, just remembering that there were a lot of mistakes from that time.”

“What mistakes?!”

Listening to what Kurumi had said, Japanese gothic Kurumi raised her voice to criticize.

“Japanese style and gothic! Japanese style and Lolita! This appearance is the gesture of truth I am pursuing!

“...Um, can you please stop saying Lolita? For some reason my back feels chilly.”

Kurumi trembled from the sudden chill, coughing a few times to reinvigorate her spirits.

Then, she bent down to pick up the box of chocolates that Japanese gothic Kurumi had just

dropped.

“Ah! M-My chocolates!”

“Like I said, stop talking like that.” (Japanese gothic Kurumi talks in a manner with dramatic pauses in Japanese)

Kurumi said with sweat dropping as she turned to the box she had acquired.

A frilly ribbon and vividly colorful paper for wrapping...the personality of the gift maker had already erupted at this point, but the problem was the thing attached to the box.

For a moment, she thought it was a calling card just like an eyepatch, but this wasn't the same. The address was written *To Shido-san*. From the faint thickness—it was an envelope.

“...”

Despite the ill feeling, Kurumi opened the envelope. Meanwhile Japanese gothic Kurumi let out an “Ah! Don't!” scream, but Kurumi chose to ignore this.

“...Oh”

A few seconds later, Kurumi felt beads of sweat form on her forehead.

This was undoubtedly a love letter meticulously written to detail sentiments of adoration. Moreover, the usage was a misunderstood attempt at the romance of the old-fashioned Taisho era. The only saving grace was that this imitation of calligraphy was almost impossible to read.

Although Kurumi was sweating profusely, she managed to stabilize her heartbeat and raised her face up once more.

“...A-Anyway, your thoughts have been seen through, please resign yourself.”

However, Japanese gothic Kurumi suddenly cheekily smiled back in response.

“Yes, yes...as expected of the future *me*. I didn't expect to be this cleverly preempted.”

“Even if you offer praise now, nothing will change—”

“Also, on the grounds of the ambush, sharing a bed with Shido-san...as I thought the adult *me* is truly radical. I will need to continue studying honestly.”

“...”

Hearing what Japanese gothic Kurumi had said, Kurumi turned silent.

Then, as if to match that, Shido let out an “hmm” sound while turning over in his sleep.

“...”

Kurumi pulled the bed sheets to cover Shido’s shoulders and then turned to spread her shadow below Japanese gothic Kurumi’s feet.

“Ehhhhh?! Ignoring me?!”

Japanese gothic Kurumi left that last complaint before being sucked into the shadow.

“...Fu.”

As the figure of Japanese gothic Kurumi disappeared from Shido’s room, Kurumi’s shadow returned to its original size.

Kurumi sighed slightly, leaning back to stretch her body.

“Yare, yare...all of them doing as they please.”

She was forced to do such extraneous things when it obvious that the main event would be tomorrow—

“...”

At that moment, thinking back to what Japanese Gothic Kurumi had said, Kurumi turned back to look at Shido.

A quiet look at his unprotected sleeping face.

“...”

Kurumi held her breath back as she suddenly averted her gaze. For some reason, her face felt slightly hot.

It must have been due to the lack of sleep. Kurumi slammed her heel on the floor as she dived into her shadow.



“Ha...at long last I managed to settle this before morning.”

Returning to her stronghold, Kurumi let out a long sigh before snapping her finger.

The Astral Dress she was wearing dissolved into the air as she changed back to her original underwear.

“—*Me.*”

“Yes.”

Under Kurumi’s command, a clone dressed normally (the so-called moderate *Kurumi*) appeared from the shadows.

“I have to take a nap. I’ll ask later about what happened during this period. —In addition, the four clones caught today should absolutely not be let loose.”

“Understood, then please rest well, *me.*”

After giving that courtesy, the clone returned back to the shadows.

“Really, it took quite a lot of time and effort...”

Kurumi sighed once more. Just before preparing to take off her underwear and get ready for bed, Kurumi suddenly remembered something.

“Incidentally...”

She snapped her fingers again. Then, in response to that movement, four boxes flew out from her shadow.

A box with a black card.

A box with blood stains on the wrapping paper.

A flashy box held by a cat.

A box with colorful paper and accompanied with a letter.

Yes, these boxes were the presents that the radical *Kurumi* tried to give to Shido.

Everything had been collected immediately due to an issue with packaging, delivery method, or attachments—speaking of which, she still hadn’t confirmed what chocolate they had made.

Not knowing what was inside now was of no particular concern, but Kurumi let her curiosity get the better of herself. She opened the boxes one by one.

“...! This is...”

Then, all of the boxes had been opened. Kurumi’s eyes widened as she held back her breath.

The reason was extremely simple. After all, eyepatch, bandage, sweet Lolita, and Japanese gothic Kurumi, all of them—had chosen the same designs for the chocolate.

Cute chocolates in the shape of small cats lined up regularly in the box.

“...”

Staring at this for a while, Kurumi let out a long sigh.

“...Really, it can't be helped now.”

As Kurumi said so, she took out a box from the paper bag on the table—the chocolates that she had made herself to give to Shido tomorrow.

Although a bit wasteful, she unpacked and opened the box.

Then inside, cat-shaped chocolates similar to the ones made by her clones appeared in sight.

That's right. The four clones had all chosen the same shape of chocolates as the original Kurumi.

“...In the end, I am still me.”

Kurumi let out a self-deprecating laugh as she removed four chocolates and replaced the empty space with a single chocolate made from each of her four clones.

Yamai Exchange

“Ahhh...”

In the early morning, Itsuka Shido leaned back in front of his house and stretched.

It was a pleasant morning. Even though it was cold, it also served to blow away the last bit of drowsiness.

“Okay... let’s go.”

“Well, the doors and windows are locked.”

“Okay!”

Such a voice came from behind in response to what Shido said.

The voice belonged to a girl wearing a junior high school uniform and two white ribbons in her hair tied in pigtails, and a girl in a high school uniform with night-colored hair. It’s Shido’s little sister, Kotori, and his classmate who lives right next door to them: Yatogami Tohka. Three people, including Shido, are now going to school.

“By the way, Tohka, have you seen Kaguya or Yuzuru?”

Just then, Shido asked Tohka.

Yamai Kaguya and Yamai Yuzuru are twin sisters who live in the same apartment complex as Tohka next to the Itsuka household. They also attend Raizen High school like Shido and Tohka but they haven’t seen the sisters this morning.

“No, I haven’t seen them either.”

“I see. Judging how they normally act, they probably went on ahead to see who could get there the fastest.”

Shido chuckled while scratching his cheek and at that moment, the apartment door flew open and two girls walked out.

One girl with a slim build and hair braided up.

The other was a girl with a plump build and her hair tied in three braids.

As far as the five senses were concerned, they were essentially identical to each other even down to their uniforms. The only way to tell them apart was their hairstyles, expressions, and bodies.

Now everyone was here. These are the twin sisters previously mentioned: Yamai Kaguya and Yamai Yuzuru.

“Oh! Kaguya!”

Tohka waved her hand and approached the Yamai sisters.

“Ah, morning—”

At that moment, it wasn't the girl who was called Kaguya who responded, but Yuzuru, who was standing next to her, raised her hand and cleared her throat in shock.

“Muu?”

Tohka tilted her head in confusion but this time she another look at Kaguya as if she noticed something and twitched her shoulders to answer:

“Greetings...no, Good morning, Tohka. Hehehe, the right hand of this palace is the one that feels pain today.”

“Muuu? Good morning...?”

In the face of the utterly unnatural Kaguya, Tohka tilted her head to the side with a doubt in her face.

At this moment, Kotori started talking to Yuzuru:

“Yuzuru, you are early!”

“Answer—”

This time, it was Kaguya who answered instead of Yuzuru. But she also immediately widened her eyes and quickly looked away.

“Uh... greetings. Good morning, Kotori. I'm really comfortable this morning.”

“Oh, yeah...?”

Kotori was also puzzled by Yuzuru's strange response.

“...”

“...”

In the face of Tohka's reaction, Kaguya and Yuzuru shed sweat in silence, taking steps in unison, and quickly embarked on the road to school.

“So, what happened to those two...?”

“Who knows...?”

Shido stared at the backs of their heads and tilted his head in wonder.

“...”

“...”

Kaguya and Yuzuru quickly walked to school that morning. After confirming that no one else was around, they said at the same time:

“—Hehe, it’s really ugly. It’s very shameful to show up so quickly. It’s impossible for a junior like you to imitate this palace of strength.”

“Rebuttal. Yuzuru said this sentence to you originally. Do you really think your response just now was any good?”

“Yuzuru spoke with Kaguya’s voice while Kaguya spoke with Yuzuru’s voice and tone,” they said to each other.

This could be an illusion, but it looked like Yuzuru’s sleepy-looking eyes widened in surprise but Kaguya’s eyes which, by contrast, were always wide were now narrowed. That said, the two weren’t fooling around nor did it seem like they’d somehow exchanged their souls with each other. There was a very simple explanation for what was going on:

That’s right. The Yamai sisters, who looked exactly the same, were now dressed in each other’s clothing.

Kaguya, dressed as Yuzuru, folded her arms while emphasizing her chest and exhaled angrily.

“Hmph! Say what you want! Anyway, it will be you who’ll end up crying!”

“Mocking. Yuzuru will prove it to you. If Kaguya can do it, then there’s no reason that Yuzuru can’t do it either. If you wish to cry for mercy, it’s best to take advantage of the opportunity to do it now.”

Kaguya and Yuzuru glared at each other while growling like dogs ready to fight each other.



It all started yesterday.

One of the rooms in the Spirit Mansion next door to the Itsuka household held the voices of the Yamai sisters.

“—Eh?! Yuzuru! Your personality is so gloomy!”

“Disagreement. A woman like Kaguya whose body is half made of shame has no right to say such things to Yuzuru.”

“Don’t compare me to BUFFERIN^[6] painkillers!”

Kaguya and Yuzuru hurled insults at each other with ferocious intensity that seemed to be reaching a fever pitch. This scene was very rare for the normally harmonious sisters of Yamai. However, it was caused by a trivial matter:

“Furious. After all, Kaguya ate Yuzuru’s cheese so casually!”

“What?! You ate my pudding as well! It’s even!”

That’s right. Just because Kaguya ate Yuzuru’s cheese that she put in the refrigerator and Yuzuru ate Kaguya’s pudding.

If anyone else were to bear witness to such a trivial manner would be dumbfounded. In fact, even Kaguya and Yuzuru didn’t expect to start arguing so aggressively because of such a small thing.

However, once the anger sparks, it burns out of control very quickly.

“Disagreement. The reason that Yuzuru accidentally ate the pudding was because it was the only one in the refrigerator. Unlike Kaguya who knew that there were two packs of cheese in the refrigerator and very deliberately ate Yuzuru’s as well.”

“So I didn’t apologize! No matter what the process is, the fact remains that you ate my pudding, it’s strange to pin all the blame on me alone!”

“Disagreement. Yuzuru isn’t completely without fault, but that was only because Kaguya made a mistake first. Take a step back and consider that, even if it was an accident, Kaguya didn’t admit it honestly!”

“Well...! T-This...!”

“Conjecture. Kaguya must think that as long as Yuzuru admits to making the same mistake that it will decrease Kaguya’s sin?”

⁶ Bufferin painkillers are a combination of aspirin and three different types of antacids: calcium carbonate, magnesium carbonate, and magnesium oxide. The antacids act as a buffering agent to help neutralize stomach irritation that aspirin may cause.

“Don’t look down on me like that! I wouldn’t resort to such things! It’s just that... expensive pudding has that kind of taste to it...”

Kaguya looked away awkwardly.

Yuzuru frowned.

“Sudden. Didn’t Kaguya find herself eating the wrong pudding and cheese?”

“Yes but what can I do about it? It’s the first time I bought that brand! Besides, I haven’t eaten the cheese.”

“Don’t mind. Forget it, it’s Yuzuru being silly, thinking that there is a way to communicate with Kaguya. The original problem lies in intelligence, not character.”

“What...!”

When Kaguya heard what Yuzuru said, she glared at her sister viciously.

“Is it necessary to be so uncomfortable? By the way, I’ve always wanted to ask about it: what’s with your vocabulary that you always say those words at the beginning? Do you think it sounds cool? You criticized me just now, but you made a fool of yourself at the same time!”

“Anger. Kaguya is of ill breed, but still has things to say to Yuzuru? This is simply Yuzuru speaking. Uneducated people like Kaguya may not understand it otherwise.”

“What are you doing!”

After Yuzuru finished speaking, Kaguya answered with a different voice.

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The battle between the sisters did not stop and they finally lost their tempers.

“I’ll say! You know what kind of education is not educated? Using that kind of speech: it only makes you sound stupid!”

“Angry. You are so embarrassed. That being the case, it is not difficult for Kaguya to speak normally. Shouldn’t you think that as long as you speak with a bad attitude, you look authoritative? It’s ridiculous.”

“Only, not just! It is the majesty of this palace that comes out naturally! Don’t be rude!”

“Mocking. You seem to change your tone of speech when you suddenly think about it. It’s really easy, at this level, Yuzuru can easily imitate it. Basically, Yuzuru is more versatile than Kaguya. Everything Kaguya does, Yuzuru can do it all and better.”

“What—! This is a heinous lie. How dare you speak so wildly to the Queen of the hurricane?! This sin, even if you serve the lord, this is not enough to atone for it! You are a part of me!”

“Provocation. So, do you want to try it?”

“What do you mean?”

Kaguya was confused when she heard what Yuzuru said.

“Try it...? What are you trying?”

“Explanation. It’s the match ‘who is better at being Kaguya and Yuzuru.’”

“...!”

The mention of a [competition] made Kaguya raise an eyebrow.

However, this is a matter of course. The word “Competition” had a special meaning for the Yamai sisters.

Originally, they were actually a single person with Spirit powers. However, because of an incident that caused the original Spirit Yamai to split in two and give birth to Kaguya and Yuzuru which made them a special case. Sooner or later, they were going to have to come together and become a single Spirit again. At that time, only one person’s consciousness would remain as a result which is to say—survive.

In order to determine who would be allowed to live on, Kaguya and Yuzuru continued to engage each other in various competitions and so far, they’d clashed a hundred times.

“I firmly believe that, if Kaguya can do it, there is no way that Yuzuru can’t. Kaguya can’t be immersed in it.”

“Did all of this come from Yuzuru’s delusion?!”

“I feel malice coming from your talking style!”

Kaguya shouted unconvinced. However, Yuzuru spoke indifferently.

“Required. Now that you say that you can compare yourself to Yuzuru, please prove it to me.”

“So how should we prove it?”

“Answer. It’s simple: tomorrow, Yuzuru will act like Kaguya and Kaguya will act like Yuzuru.”

“What?” When she heard this, Kaguya’s eyes widened in surprise.

“I... become Yuzuru?”

“Confirmation. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the two of us look the same. All we have to change is our hairstyles and behavior to match. Of course—only appearances.”

“Oh... so it’s like that.”

At that moment, Kaguya seemed to be aware of Yuzuru’s intentions and folded her arms thoughtfully.

“So you mean that you want us to try to act like each other all day and prevent anyone else from being able to recognize us?”

“Agreement. That’s it. Even though Yuzuru doesn’t think that Kaguya could hope to pretend to be me and not give herself away.”

“That’s what I should be saying about you! It’ll be impossible for you to pretend to be me.”

After Yuzuru and Kaguya assumed fighting poses against each other, they spread their hands out wide. Then Kaguya untied her braided hair worn on the back of her head. Yuzuru followed Kaguya’s example as she wrapped her braided hair around the back of her head. At the same time, Kaguya narrowed her eyes a little to give a feeling of laziness. Yuzuru, on the other hand, widened her eyes to give a more energetic expression.

The sisters’ actions are perfectly exchanged and give the same impression of the other.

“Oh... you look just like me, Yuzuru.”

“Answer. Kaguya, you really look like—ah.”

“...? What... uh, ah.”

At that moment, Kaguya and Yuzuru looked at each other’s chests, eyes wide open. That’s right: even though their appearances were indeed identical, but now the two were in a state where Kaguya’s face was matched with Yuzuru’s plump chest while Yuzuru’s face was paired with Kaguya’s smaller chest.

Ten minutes later:

“Complaint. It hurts! It hurts! It hurts, Kaguya!”

“Shut up, just bear with it!”

Kaguya was holding a silk wrap around Yuzuru’s chest in her sister’s room.



“Pleading. Hurry up. Some of it was made up by Yuzuru’s acting skills. Leave it to Kaguya to weep over her delayed growth spurt.”

“What a terrible idea that is! If we do that, I won’t be able to change back!”

“Understood. You’re right... So, what about having Kaguya get over her inferiority complex and finally put on a chest pad?”

“...What?!”

Kaguya heard those words and immediately held her breasts.

This was hardly a surprise: because Kaguya and Yuzuru were complete opposites in terms of their breast size: her bra was stuffed with breast pads; just one was not nearly enough to reproduce Yuzuru’s breast size. It was clear that Kaguya hadn’t anticipated needing to use more than one.

“... ow, this is too shameful. How many centimeters do you have?!”

Kaguya gritted her teeth while Yuzuru’s cries of pain echoed throughout the room.

“Recall... Yuzuru remembers that it is about ninety centimeters... but honestly, it is heavy and troublesome. Isn’t it more convenient to be able to move as freely as Kaguya?”

“...”

After Yuzuru finished speaking, Kaguya’s expression softened as she smiled sweetly at her sister.

“Suffer.”

“...! Wailing. It hurts...!”

Kaguya still wore an angel-like expression on her face as she pulled on the wrap more tightly. Yuzuru’s painful cries rang out through the room.

—Which brings us back to now:

“Patience. Well...”

Yuzuru, now dressed as Kaguya, endured the pressure with her breasts bound while doing her best to pay attention to the teacher’s lesson. She was in a math lesson and if she was being honest with herself, she was having trouble paying attention.

However, Yuzuru’s acting as Kaguya was impressive.

While trying to imitate Kaguya's unfamiliar tone was troublesome, it seemed that so far, at least, no one seemed to realize her true identity yet.

Yuzuru glanced at Kaguya intently and watched as she massaged her shoulders. It seemed like she was sore because she wasn't used to bearing the excess weight on her chest. Perhaps she felt Yuzuru's gaze on her; Kaguya promptly stopped massaging her shoulders.

"Inhale. Exhale."

Yuzuru exhaled quietly through her nose while trying not to move her head and avoid looking at Kaguya.

It seemed that Kaguya hadn't slipped up yet either but, as far as Yuzuru was concerned, it was really only a matter of time before she gave herself away.

—Just then, the bell began to ring.

"Huh? Ah We'll end it here for today. Everyone, make sure to review today's lesson at home."

The math teacher quickly covered the final point of the lesson before wrapping it up. Yuzuru quickly stood up and saluted and then clenched her fist in an attempt to calm down her nerves.

Since it was possible for teachers to call on students by name to answer questions, it wasn't something that could be taken lightly, but the most crucial opportunity to win this competition against Kaguya was during the lunch break.

That said, there was no need to be too neurotic: Kaguya followed a daily routine so it wouldn't be too difficult—

"...!"

Yuzuru gave the matter more thought before her eyebrows shot up.

The reason was simple: someone had put their hands on her shoulders from behind, taking Yuzuru by surprise. She had to be careful not to speak like she would normally as she peaked over her shoulder at the offender.

She spotted a female student with a long fringe. She is a classmate that shared three classes with them: Himukai Eiko. Yuzuru had no idea why her right hand was bandaged. Maybe she'd injured it?

While Yuzuru and Kaguya shared an apartment in the Spirit Mansion and often spent time together during their days off, they don't spend all 24 hours a day together. Of course, the two had their own groups of friends at school.

Eiko is one of Kaguya's friends. Although she had nothing to do with Yuzuru, she often saw them together chatting with each other.

While Yuzuru was thinking about this sort of thing, Eiko spoke first:

"The Covenant is here. Let us go, Hermes."

"Question. ...what?"

In the face of an unexpected encounter, Yuzuru couldn't help but tilt her head in and frown in wonder.

"It's time for the <Sage Meeting>. You should have received a notice about it last week."

"Oh, uh..."

—What's with this agreement? Yuzuru didn't feel like going to this meeting. She could feel her feet freezing and unable to move naturally and did not want to move.

However, as she was pretending to be Kaguya, she couldn't refuse the invitation. Yuzuru soon found herself being pulled from the classroom by Eiko.

"... Ah, yes, there is a <Sage Meeting> today..."

After the bell rang to signal the end of the fourth lesson, Kaguya squinted as she watched Yuzuru get dragged away by her classmate, Eiko (Actually, she now called herself "Onerios") and scratched her cheek.

"Yuzuru will be okay... I knew about it beforehand and told them that there is no way I could go today—"

Kaguya shook her head vigorously, as if to shake off the thought that had just crossed her mind for a moment.

"No, she deserves it. I want her to experience my power...!"

Kaguya leaned against the back of the chair and exhaled angrily.

While it was true that Kaguya ate Yuzuru's cheese in such a casual manner, she felt that Yuzuru was being ridiculous. No matter the reason, the fact remained that Yuzuru ate Kaguya's pudding and then had the gall to call her stupid. Sure, she made a mistake because she ate the cheese, no matter how utterly unkind—

"Ah, there you are, Yuzuru."

“Huh...?”

Just as Kaguya was pouting, another female student suddenly called out to her.

The other girl wore a short skirt of exquisite length, and the sleeves of the blazer showed a cut-out cardigan. Just staying at the scene will feel a sweet aroma, a sweet and gentle girl.

She remembered her name: Kyung Ai. Kaguya didn't talk to her very often, but she did occasionally see her hanging out with Yuzuru.

“Hey... Answer. What's the matter, Ai?”

“Would you like to come here for lunch with Asumi and me? We have something to discuss with you”

“Answer. Okay.”

“Yuzuru-san, what's wrong with you? It feels like your vocabulary is a little monotonous.”

“...! Answer. That's all right...”

After being called out like that, Kaguya felt sweat trail down her cheek. She'd just realized that she'd used a different way of saying “answer” compared to how Yuzuru would say it with two kanji.

Yuzuru seemed to be able to do it without any problems but it was suddenly much more difficult for Kaguya to express her actions and mood.

Nonetheless, Kaguya tried her best and continued to say:

“... It's pitch back. You should grab your lunch, then let's go together.”

“Hey, suddenly it turns into a feeling of evil? Fear of such a hobby”

“Purgatory. You are more attentive. Then, what are you going to discuss?”

After Kaguya hurriedly replied, Ai twisted her body in a cute gesture and answered:

“I've fallen in love with my new boyfriend. I'm worried about getting along with him, and hoping you can give me some advice.”

“...What?”

When he heard what Ai said, Kaguya forgot the vocabulary of the two words attached at the beginning, and Ai tilted her head to express doubt.

“—Thank you everyone for your attendance today. Let us begin our <Sage Meeting>.”

It was during the lunch period. A weird figure said so in a mysterious room with blackout curtains.

Since it is in school, there should be students here... But Yuzuru could not find any words other than “strange” to describe this person wearing a black robe and a peculiar mask on her face.

“...”

However, Yuzuru was in no position to judge anyone else’s appearance because she’d also been forced to dress up like that student that everyone had called <Zeus>.

“... Doubt. What the hell is this...”

Yuzuru murmured softly as she looked around the room. Several students dressed like Yuzuru were seated around the round table. Among them was Eiko, who brought Yuzuru here (she mentally corrected herself; her name was “Oneiros” right now).

However, everyone seemed to be indifferent to Yuzuru’s doubt, and each spoke in turn:

“The reason why we are convening today is that the acts of <Organization> have reached a point where it cannot be ignored.”

“Wait... <Zeus>... don’t tell me that...”

“Exactly. The [Trial] as foretold in the [Dead Sea Document] is near.”

“How could this be? Do you intend to awaken the <Beast of the End>?”

“Aren’t you afraid of the <Darkness of the Gods>?”

“Ah... if that’s the case then we definitely can’t just sit idly by.”

“Right. But if we want to save the world, <three artifacts> are needed.”

“However, we have to defeat the <Gatekeeper> first before we can recover the artifacts.”

“...”

Faced with the ongoing dialogue in front of her, Yuzuru felt cold sweat trailing down her body. It feels like a lot of difficult words were being used and the content is unintelligible.

Maybe there were doubts about Yuzuru’s behavior, so <Zeus> said:

“<Hermes> what’s the matter? You, who are always so eager to speak, haven’t so much as uttered a single word. It’s unsettling.”

“...! Uh, no, this palace... is fine.”

“? Forget about it. Just go ahead and speak your mind.”

“! Thoughts? No, uh, well...”

Finding herself put on the spot, leaving Yuzuru an incoherent mess. As a result, the other members of the <Sage Meeting> cast her a skeptical look.

“Something doesn’t feel right. Are you really <Hermes>?”

“Is the magical hand of the <Organization> already here? You there, please take off your mask!”

“...!”

The other students in their masks began to wonder and Yuzuru felt her shoulders twitch in surprise. She’d finally managed to make it to this point, how could they have figured out her identity here? Yuzuru felt her heart drop in shame as she stood up abruptly and removed the mask and robe as requested.

“Oh! Hahahahahahahahaha! It seems that <Organization> is nothing to be afraid of! The evil eye of <Hermes> has already mastered the <Three Artifacts>!”

“Oh...!”

Yuzuru answered confidently while all of the other masked students’ eyes went wide with surprise.

“Is that right? It’s <Hermes>.”

“Well, so where are they?”

“Well... it all depends on the <Will of Chaos>. When space and time converge, the answer will be between zero and one.”

It seemed that Yuzuru herself didn’t have a clue what she was talking about now.

However the group of masked students immediately put their hands to their chins thoughtfully before nodding in agreement and promptly began taking notes.

“U-Uh, so the next step would be the detailed situation around the <Three Artifacts>—”

“Well...”

After hearing what <Zeus> said, Yuzuru couldn't believe what happened. This was hardly a surprise: everything she'd just said was utter nonsense. All she did was think of Kaguya's speech and tried to mimic it. If anyone decided to pursue it further, it would probably be sloppy. It would be better to say that it was already full of flaws.

However, <Zeus> went on to say some unexpected words:

“—Swords, mirrors, gouyu[3] are really too particular about the original direction. It should be more innovative.”

“...What?”

The situation suddenly changed, and it was completely different from what it was just before, so Yuzuru was at a loss. Other members answered:

“No, it's important to stick to the basics. It would make more sense to adapt the <Three Artifacts> to match the modern world.”

“Yeah, that's right! Make the readers wonder: ‘should it follow the original setting?’”

“Oh but with all the myths added, will it be impossible to put an ending to it? How should we integrate...”

“On this point, didn't <Hermes> just point it out to all of us just now? Between zero and one: in other words, the whole world was actually just a video game!”

“...! O-Original! If we do it this way, then the previous settings all make more sense!”

“...Question. What the hell are you talking about?”

Yuzuru's original explanation was made even more confusing as she asked for an explanation complete with a frown. Everyone in turn looked back at her with their heads tilted and a look of wonder on their faces:

“What is there to say? We're discussing the setting for our new works.”

“The <Sage Meeting> is an occasional inspirational meeting organized by members of the literature and art clubs who are suffering from writer's or artist's block.”

“By the way, there will be more frequent meetings closer to the deadline for the newsletter publication or Newcomer's award.”

“Oh, and thank you <Hermes> for giving us such unexpected ideas for innovation.”

“...Understand. So that's what it was all about.”

After hearing everyone's explanation behind their word choice, Yuzuru let out a sigh. After being led to such a strange place in a state of confusion, now everything made sense. It turns out this way of helping suits Kaguya's personality.

However, this peace of mind lasted for only a second. The group of masked students while taking notes with one hand take another good look at Yuzuru.

"<Hermes> let us write down your next prophecy."

"You know this world is fictional, so who created it with one hand?"

"Think. Uh, well..."

She could feel the overall attitude becoming more and more positive than before. All the same, Yuzuru's eyes drifted around the room at a loss for words.

At the same time, a group of girls gathered in a corner of classroom 2-3, chatting lively while eating their bentos.

"— Then, it has to be my boyfriend. I'm too shy to do some intimate moves with others"

"I suppose, but doesn't it all come out to the same thing?"

"..."

"But we have been dating for almost a month, and he has never kissed anyone else. After watching a movie, shopping, and eating, I asked him where to go next, and he answered that I should return home. I hate hate hate hate that sort of answer! At this point, you should launch an offensive attack to solidify the relationship!"

"This is really annoying... speaking of which, to let the girls ask about the next arrangement is just too ridiculous"

"..."

"But I don't want to take the initiative. So I want to ask Yuzuru if there is any way to express it gently."

"Ah!"

Suddenly the topic turned to herself, and Kaguya could not help but yelp in surprise.

"Yuzuru, are you okay? You're making some strange noises..."

"Yeah, you haven't said a single word since we started talking, are you sure you're alright?"

“Falling. I-I’m okay.”

Kaguya’s face was cold and sweaty as she shook her head vehemently to deny everything.

Well just like Kaguya had her own circle of friends at school, Yuzuru likewise also had her own group of friends at school, but she didn’t expect them to discuss such a topic. Of course, Kaguya was a girl as well and so she’d talked about such girls before. However, the conversation was going faster than Kaguya was able to keep up, leaving her unsure of what to do.

“Look, the reason I have my current boyfriend is because of Yuzuru’s advice. I never would have expected the Yamai-style of physical contact to be so effective.”

“That’s true. Speaking of which, you still haven’t said anything yet. Please tell us”

“Uh, t-this...”

Kaguya found herself sweating profusely. What exactly is the Yamai-style of physical contact? Of course, Kaguya was a Yamai as well but she hadn’t the faintest clue of the physical contact they were talking about.

The girls present clearly thought that Kaguya’s attitude was a bit different and soon Ai and the others tilted their heads to one side.

“Yuzuru, what’s wrong with you? Your whole face is red.”

“Yeah it’s a lot like Kaguya...”

“...!”

Kaguya listened and her shoulders shook in shock.

How could she be failing at this stage? She did her best to restrain her fluttering heart and pretended to clear her throat calmly.

“Hellfire. Okay, okay, I’ll teach you how to use the Yamai’s skills.”

“Oh!”

“I was hoping that you would say that!”

In the face of applause from the two girls, Kaguya desperately struggled to find a way to proceed.

After a few seconds, she coughed.

“Abyss. For example, when two people walk together, they inadvertently cling to each other’s fingers...”

Kaguya yelled out despite her burning red cheeks. Ai and Asumi stared at her for several seconds before giggling.

“Oh Yuzuru, what happened to you today? So pure”

“That’s right, it’s really cute! But aren’t there any tricks like the one you taught us before?”

“W-What!”

A more intense way than before...?

Kaguya’s mind worked furiously under the expectant gazes of Ai and Asumi.



“Sigh. Hey...”

“After the <Sage Meeting> ended, Yuzuru stepped out of the room and walked down the corridor.

Although she had to use a lot of difficult words afterwards, she somehow managed to overcome the challenge. But if she continued, there was no guarantee that she wouldn’t blow her cover. If she was being honest, Yuzuru really wanted to read the story and see what kind of story they would come up with.

“Sigh. But...It’s finally over.”

Yuzuru took a deep breath before pulling out her smartphone to check the time. There was still a little bit of time before fifth period began so it would be okay for her to take a little break before class started.

However, just as Yuzuru was about to do that, she heard a voice behind her as she headed for the classroom.

“Oh, what a coincidence, <Magic Night>.”

“...?”

Yuzuru blinked as she heard the strange title and tilted her head in confusion while frowning again.

It's no wonder: she spotted an older senior student but instead of the standard uniform, she favored a punk-themed hoodie under her blazer and tinkling silver jewelry on her arms and neck. She also noticed a large guitar case slung on her back.

If Yuzuru remembered correctly, she was a student of the Godpunk Wind Orchestra with Kaguya's group at the Pop Music Club. Her name was—something related to fire: <Fire Lily>.

It doesn't sound like her own name but she seemed happy with it nonetheless. Still, she'd just called her <Magic Night> which was apparently one of the nicknames that Kaguya occasionally used. Just how many nicknames did Kaguya have?

"Who are you? I don't know anyone named <Fire Lily>."

"Oh, what are you talking about? Of course, I asked you to write some more new lyrics."

"...Confirm. What?"

She didn't have a clue what this student was talking about while Yuzuru stared at her blankly. However, she didn't seem to realize Yuzuru's appearance at all as she pulled out a piece of paper and spread it out.

The paper was lined with dense strokes of kanji characters with some strange German characters thrown in as well.

"When I first heard your lyrics, I was really touched. I never thought that someone would write a word that fit my worldview so well."

"O-Oh, this way..."

She didn't understand what she said, complete with a handsome pose. Yuzuru could feel a new wave of sweat trail down her cheeks.

"However, I'm sorry. The lyrics of the new song have not been written yet but it should be done within the next day or so. I'll let you know when I have it finished."

Yuzuru's competition with Kaguya was only limited to today. Tomorrow, Kaguya would be able to figure out this problem herself so Yuzuru decided to answer like that.

"Ahaha, what are you talking about <Illusion Night>? Your creative ability isn't that high!"

However, <Fire Lily> only laughed as she set down the guitar case slung on her back and pulled a dark guitar from it.

“Spit out words from the lips along with the melody. Come on, let me see the glory of the moment!”

Then she swayed the guitar pick without a second thought and played it on the spot in the center of the corridor. The music suddenly sounded, and the students cast a curious look.

Yuzuru, who usually listened to Kaguya’s speech, probably understood the meaning of her words—in short, it’s to improvise with the melody.

“Confusion. Hey...”

To be honest, it’s embarrassing to be this extreme but Yuzuru is now Kaguya...rather, she was known as <Illusion Night> so she had to bite the bullet.

“D-Dark... Purgatory?”

“Dark Purgatory!”

Yuzuru stuttered while trying her best to ignore the guitarist while repeating the lyrics with the melody.

“Heaven...wing?”

“Gu-Guten Tag?” (German for hello).

“Guten Ta—g!”

As a result, this shameful approach to mental retardation continued until a teacher came over to investigate after hearing the commotion.

“Ah, really, why are they talking about that topic...?”

Kaguya sighed as she muttered under her breath as she stood in front of the sink. She poured water into her hands and splashed it onto her face. She could still feel heat radiating from her face.

However, this is understandable as Kaguya has been teaching love “skills” to Asumi and Ai since the lunch break started.

She’d been under a constant onslaught from the two girls in turn, and relying on her delusional powers to put forth a lot of ideas. In the end, Kaguya was able to escape by making a break for the bathroom. The reason Kaguya was so flushed was not because of the lascivious topic of conversation, but rather she was ashamed of the delusional suggestions she proposed.

In short, she finally managed to get through the lunch break without giving away her identity. Kaguya sighed as she wiped her face and hands with a handkerchief and stepped into the corridor.

However, at that moment—

“Aha! I found you, Yuzuru-Onnee chan! Where were you?”

“What?”

Hearing the sudden call, Kaguya raised her eyebrows slightly and turned her head.

She spotted a young girl waving at her. It was Hori Ayaka of the costume club. She was also a student that occasionally talked to Yuzuru.

Kaguya felt that she was in trouble again but nonetheless turned to face her.

“Scorching heat. Is there something wrong, Ayaka?”

“What are you talking about? You promised to be my fashion model today! Everyone is waiting for you!”

“Blushing. A-Ah, something like this. I’m so sorry.”

“Okay, so let’s get going right now!”

“Ah! Wait a minute...”

After waiting for Kaguya to finish speaking, she grabbed her hand and dragged her down the hallway. She then opened the door to the housekeeping clubroom and walked in. In an instant, all of the female students in the room focused their gaze on Kaguya.

“Oh, here she is! Where were you, Yuzuru?”

“Eliminate. No, sorry, something came up.”

“Forget about it. We don’t have time to worry about that. Quickly, change into this.”

After saying that, a schoolgirl with glasses passed her clothes that were on the table. It seems to be still in the rough stitching stage. It was a dress made with beautiful fabrics. It felt so comfortable and Kaguya couldn’t help but admire it.

“Okay, please change into it quickly.”

“Mystery. Got it. Then—”

Kaguya was halfway through taking off her uniform when she remembered the difference in chest size and stopped.

That's right: although Kaguya's chest was the same size as Yuzuru's thanks to her chest pads, if Kaguya took her clothes off, then her identity would be exposed instantly.

"Blazing sky. I-I have to go over there to change."

"Why? Just change into it here..."

The members of the costume club tilted their heads with a look of confusion. Kaguya smiled bitterly as she made her way to the next room with the dress in hand.

She quickly took off her uniform and clumsily put on the dress before returning to the original room.

"Turn around. How does it feel?"

Kaguya twirled and struck a pose at the student's request, getting an exclamation of approval from the members as they saw her.

"Yuzuru onee-chan is so pretty!"

"Bodies really do come in different shapes and sizes. It's important that we find the right person to model the dress."

"Good job, President! This dress will surely help us win the competition!" said the crowd of club members loudly.

However, the bespectacled student called the 'President' stared at Kaguya sadly.

"Um..."

"...? What's wrong, Miss President?"

"It's nothing. It just feels a bit different from the figure that I saw before..."

"...!"

Kaguya couldn't help but be shocked by what the President had said.

"D-Domineering. Even without this dress, Yuzuru has always been like this!"

Kaguya stammered with a change in tone while the President groaned for a moment while frowning.

“Hmm... Perhaps I’m just overthinking things...”

The president finally said with her arms crossed. Warm, sweet, glorious relief swept through Kaguya.

“In any case, Yuzuru, can you change into this one now? I want to confirm the size for this one as well.”

“Holy Demon. It’ll be a trivial matter. What do I need to change into next—?”

At that moment, Kaguya gasped at the next outfit. The next outfit that the president was holding was a sexy underwear that would clearly show the shape of the chest.



—The bell chimed throughout the school.

“Sigh...Ugh.”

Yuzuru, who was physically and mentally exhausted, sighed in the noisy classroom.

A lot of unexpected things happened to her today. She figured that it would be easy to imitate Kaguya but she had no idea that Kaguya was involved in all kinds of things.

“Apology. Kaguya really does work hard...”

Yuzuru whispered softly so that no one could hear her. Maybe it was because of how much time had passed or because of today’s experience, her anger at Kaguya has gradually subsided and in its place, a strange feeling of respect for her sister slowly took over.

It would be ridiculous to think that Yuzuru would be good at the same things that Kaguya was good at just because they were twins. Even if they shared similar looks, those bodies harbored different personalities. That should have been clearer to Yuzuru and Kaguya more so than anyone else.

In short, Yuzuru doubted that she would be able to last much longer if she ended up getting caught by someone else that Kaguya knew. In order to leave the school as quickly as possible, Yuzuru immediately packed up her things to prepare to leave the classroom.

However, just when she was about to leave the school building—

“Kaguya! I’ve been waiting a long time for you!”

A loud voice came from nearby. She looked around and spotted a row of school girls in front of the shoe lockers, waiting for Yuzuru. Everyone was wearing sportswear with the “Raizen High School Women’s Soccer Club” logo.

“...”

There was an ominous premonition in the air. Yuzuru felt that the crisis sensor today was way too high.

As though to confirm Yuzuru’s worst fears, the girl she suspected was the captain of the team moved forward and grabbed Yuzuru’s hand.

“Thank you so much. Really, we really can’t thank you enough.”

“...Question, what exactly are you talking about?”

“Hmm? What are you talking about? Didn’t you promise to help us play?”

“...”

Her worst fears were now a reality. After hearing the captain’s words, Yuzuru’s face burst into a cold sweat.

The members in the rear didn’t notice Yuzuru’s distress as they clenched their fists and said enthusiastically:

“It’ll really help us out a lot! The opponents are regulars in all of the competitions: the high school affiliated with Senjou University...but as long as Kaguya onee-chan goes out to play, we’ll surely win!”

“...What?”

“Hey, let’s talk about motivation. If you lose the game, then the Women’s Soccer Club will be abolished. Don’t be negligent just because you’re Yamai Kaguya.”

“K-Kicked off the...team...?”

“Yeah! But Kaguya onee-chan taught us the slaying formation <Spiritual Formation, Imperial type>, I’m pretty sure we won’t lose!”

“...”

“Yeah... please, Yamai-san!”

“...Let me go to the bathroom so that I can get changed.”

Yuzuru stared at the sparkling gazes of the club members and soon found herself turning back to go to the locker room to get changed.

“E-Exhausted.”

The end of the day felt like a mountain-sized flood. Once lessons ended, Kaguya collapsed on Yuzuru’s desk.

During the lunch break, because she couldn’t bring herself to change into the underwear the club president presented under everyone’s watchful gazes, Kaguya had to make up excuses until the bell rang and she immediately made her escape. The next chance she got, she would have to remind Yuzuru to check the size of the costumes for the costume club.

Remembering Yuzuru, Kaguya was reminded of the argument she’d had with Yuzuru the previous day and couldn’t help but laugh at how silly they’d both been.

“Yuzuru is really highly valued by everyone...”

Kaguya murmured as she sighed.

She had been too arrogant in believing that there was a way that she could become Yuzuru completely. However, after spending the entire day pretending to be Yuzuru, Kaguya came to realize just how amazing she really was.

...Thankfully, the day was finally over. It looked like Yuzuru had already left and Kaguya had every intention of returning home now as well.

Just as she thought about it, she looked up.

“...Huh?” She frowned suddenly.

It was because there was a female student hiding behind the classroom door. She’d been peeking at Kaguya from time to time. It was one of the girls from her class: Hasunuma Sakiko.

“...Evil Eye. Is there something wrong?”

“Eek!”

After Kaguya called out to her loudly, Sakiko shook a little bit and fell to the ground, landing on her rear.

“Demons. Are you okay?”

Kaguya quickly rushed over and stretched out a hand to help her up, Sakiko apologized repeatedly as she grabbed Kaguya’s hand to pull herself to her feet.

“Sorry Yuzuru-san, I always seem to be causing trouble for you.”

“Phantom. No, uh ‘always?’”

Kaguya asked with her head partially tilted. Sakiko’s wording was a little strange. Sakiko seemed to confirm Kaguya’s suspicions as she bowed her head to greet her.

“T-Today, I’ll be troubling you again.”

“...Holy War. Just for the sake of clarity, let me ask what’s the matter today?”

After Kaguya asked with sweat on her forehead, Sakiko’s body trembled as she answered:

“U-Um? T-There’s someone I like...Sugiyama-san of class 2... after you listened, didn’t you say you were familiar with him?”

“...Despair...”

She heard Sakiko’s unexpected words and felt her face twitch uncontrollably. She couldn’t help but want to shout: “Why would you promise to help with such things at this point in time, Yuzuru!”

“I-Is something wrong? I’ve followed your instructions and wrote him a note asking to meet up behind the building after school.”

“Abyss. Leave it to me. I’m ready now... let me just go to the bathroom first.”

Kaguya staggered down the corridor, a hand resting on her stomach in an effort to ease the pain caused by the stress from her day so far.

“... Annoyed. This is a headache...”

Yuzuru sat on the toilet in the single room of the women’s bathroom, pressing her head into her hands and thinking hard.

It’s no wonder. After all, she has to help the match, and the outcome of the match is about the survival of an entire club.

She doesn’t know what Kaguya was thinking. The main problem was that she still had the wrap around her chest and so she couldn’t move as freely as she used to. In this state, she didn’t feel confident in being able to deal with a soccer team from a rival school.

Still, she couldn’t back out now. According to the members of the women’s soccer team, Kaguya was a key figure in this game. If she were to go missing, their team would be defeated.

Kaguya leaned back against the toilet and shouted.

Instantly—

Yes, at that exact moment.

“! Response. Just now, that was—”

“! Huh? That voice just now...”

Yuzuru and Kaguya were both holding their heads in separate stalls in the same women’s bathroom and both of them were worried.

When they heard the shout from the stall right next to them, their eyes shot wide open at the same time.



“President, is it really okay to rely so much on Kaguya once-chan? She’s been in the bathroom for a pretty long time. Could it be that she might be uncomfortable with the situation?”

“Well...”

When she heard what the young girl said, the captain of the women’s football club raised her arms while frowning.

Today, Kaguya was acting a little strange. Not only was her behavior more gentle than usual, she also seemed to have forgotten the whole game. For a while, she thought that she might have mistaken her for her twin sister, Yuzuru.

However, a brief glance at her chest told her that it could only be Kaguya: Yuzuru’s chest was the size of a soccer ball. Even from a distance, it would be impossible to confuse them.

In that way, it was as the school girl said. Could it be that Kaguya was having second thoughts? If that was the case, it would be a big problem. Today’s battle depends on Kaguya’s participation. Without her, they didn’t have a chance of beating the high school affiliated with Senjou University.

“Hmm...”

“Haha! Hahahahaha!”

When the president groaned a little uneasily, a loud laugh came suddenly, eliminating her anxiety.

“What...!”

“T-that is!”

“—Look at me!”

When the members were surprised, a figure jumped from the window on the second floor of the school building into the air.

After tumbling in the air, the figure landed on the awning at the entrance and exit of the school building.

“The distant hears the sound! The distant sees! Then praise the high reputation of Hurricane Child Yamai Kaguya!”

Kaguya proclaimed, the blazer over her shoulders billowed in the wind. After seeing her appearing gorgeously, the members stunned and shouted with emotion:

“That’s amazing! Kaguya once-chan is in great shape!”

“All of our doubts just disappeared!”

“Is it an illusion? I feel her chest shrank!”

“Maybe it was to reduce air resistance?”

The members continued to praise Kaguya with every word uttered. After receiving their sincere praise (some words made her sound a little complicated). Nonetheless, Kaguya raised her fist into the air.

“Very good! Fighters, follow this palace! I will lead you to taste the wine of victory!”

“OOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHH!!”

The members of the club yelled in response to Kaguya’s voice.

“Yuzuru-san,...no it doesn’t matter...”

Sakiko waited for Yuzuru in classroom 2-3 and she felt her fingers tremble in fright: Yuzuru had left for the bathroom almost 20 minutes ago and she hadn’t come back. Sakiko was worried that Yuzuru wasn’t feeling well.

Well, Yuzuru looked a little weird and had a restless look on her face. Plus the two-word vocabulary at the beginning of her sentences felt a little evil... could it be that she was in a bad mood? Or perhaps she was suggesting that the road to confession was a dark and hopeless one?

“...”

Sakiko glanced at the classroom clock and swallowed nervously.

In her position, it was inconvenient to urge Yuzuru but Sugiyama might show up at any moment.

In order to avoid letting the other person worry, Sakiko wrote her own name on the letter. In other words, even if Yuzuru wouldn't be able to come because of stomach pain or something else, she would still have to go behind the school building herself.

If she couldn't confess to the person she liked, she would be a girl who has lost the game of love. But if she didn't even appear at the requested spot, she would be a wicked girl who caused mischief for Sugiyama.

“...!”

Still, just the thought of going by herself, Sakiko trembled once more and was about ready to squat and give up. She couldn't think of confessing to him like this; just talking normally with him was hard enough.

“Arrive. I've kept you waiting.”

As Sakiko held her hands up in prayer, a voice came from the door of the classroom.

“Yuzuru-san! Are you alright?”

“Affirmative. I made you worry, Sakiko. There's no problems anymore. Yuzuru will teach you the means to make him fascinated by your charm.”

“T-Thank you!”

Yuzuru was very different compared to before: she was much more confident now than she had been when Sakiko first approached her earlier.

After listening to what she said, Sakiko felt a little less nervous. The two-word vocabulary no longer had a sense of malevolence behind and her chest seems to be larger than it was before. Was this the aura of a legendary person?

“Lead. No time to waste. Let's go, Sakiko.”

“O-Okay!”

Sakiko nodded gratefully as she followed the goddess of victory from behind.



That night, Shido peaked into the living room while preparing dinner in the Itsuka kitchen. The reason was simple: Tohka, Kotori, and several of the Spirits have gathered in the living room but—

“Oh! Now, I realize just how powerful Yuzuru is again. What can I say? Perfect Superman? I can’t hope to compare to it at all.”

“Denial. Nothing like that. Kaguya is truly excellent. Yuzuru isn’t even an opponent at all. I will pay respect to you.”

“Oh... how could I possibly be as good as you. Ah, I ate your cheese yesterday, I’m really sorry. I bought some more on my way home today and put it in the refrigerator. If I want some, I’ll make sure to ask you first next time.”

“Reflection. Yuzuru is also sorry. Yuzuru bought more pudding on her way home.”

The Yamai sisters were sitting side by side on the sofa like affectionate lovers, clasping their fingers together while speaking sweet words to each other.

Granted, the sisters are usually stuck together like glue but they were particularly sticky tonight. Shido felt sweat trail down his cheeks as he smiled bitterly.

“What’s going on, you two? It’s your turn again.”

After Shido finished talking, Kaguya and Yuzuru made near identical movements while proudly raising their chests.

“That’s for sure. Because my other half Yuzuru is the person who embodies the knowledge of the world.”

“Exaggeration. It makes perfect sense to praise Kaguya’s excellent ability in Megatron.”

“Exaggeration. It is a matter of course to praise Yuzuru’s excellent ability in Megatron.”

After this, they both poked at each other’s arms.

“Hahaha...”

Although he didn’t know what happened between them, the two seemed just as close as ever. When he saw them this morning, he could have sworn he smelled gunpowder—

“Ah, right.”

At that moment, Shido remembered the morning encounter and looked at them again.

“Kaguya, Yuzuru, why did you look like each other this morning? Were you having another contest again?”

“What?!”

“Shocked. Shido, how long have you known about this?”

After Shido finished speaking, Kaguya and Yuzuru were astonished. They thought that they were able to fool everyone into thinking that they were each other.

“Well, of course people would figure it out, right?”

Shido said, looking at the other Spirits. Therefore, Tohka and Kotori who’d met the Yamai sisters that morning nodded in the affirmative.

“Yeah. It looks pretty like that...Especially Kaguya. Wait a minute and tell me how you did it there.”

“Well, although the appearances are opposite of each other, their personalities won’t deceive people.”

“...”

“...”

After hearing what everyone said, Kaguya and Yuzuru looked at each other.

“Ah...! Hahahahahahahahahahaha! Look! It looks like we really can’t fake it!”

“Broken. Hehehehehehehehehehehehe! It seems that Yuzuru replacing Kaguya wouldn’t be enough.”

The two laughed wildly at the same time.

“What happened to them...?”

“Hmm...?”

They glanced at the two of them before looking at each other uncertainly.

Miku Burglar

“Help meeeeeee!”

Tobiichi Origami was fiddling with some small electronic parts in the living room of the Itsuka household when that sound came abruptly. The door flew open, and a young girl dove in.

She had long and well-groomed light indigo hair, boasting a perfectly tall figure. A Spirit and popular idol: Izayoi Miku.

“What are you doing?”

Faced with the sudden loud noise and the new visitor, Origami remained calm and collected. She stopped tinkering and watched as Miku, who couldn’t stop rolling, eventually came to a stop on the sofa.

As a result, Miku suddenly lifted her upper body and turned to face Origami.

“Ah! Origami! I’ve been looking for you! I want to talk to you honestly about something...”

“A discussion?”

After Origami answered promptly, Miku glanced around the room cautiously.

“Well, just to be safe, I just want to check: are you the only one here at the moment? No one else?”

“No.”

Origami nodded in confirmation. The other Spirits and the head of the house: Shido and Kotori were not in the Itsuka household today.

Although the owner is not present, it was strange that Origami was the only one in their living room. However, it wasn’t that big of a surprise: since the number of Spirits has increased, the Itsuka household has become a place for all of them to gather, so all of the Spirits were given backup keys.

“Has anyone installed a wiretap...?”

“No one aside from me.”

“That’s great. Really puts me at ease.”

Miku breathed a sigh of relief when she heard what Origami said.

Usually, either Shido or Kotori would be home at this time. Now, however, it was only Origami and Miku present and neither were speaking... it was a bit lonely.

“...Then about the thing I wanted to discuss with you... I have something I want to ask you.”

“What is it?”

After clarifying with Origami, Miku nodded slightly and then said:

“I was hoping that you and I could become ‘robbers!’”

“...What do you mean?”

Origami couldn’t understand the meaning behind Miku’s words as she tilted her head in confusion. As a result, Miku provided an explanation, nodding and then said:

“In other words, I need your help stealing something from someone.”

Origami’s eyebrows shot up when she heard Miku’s inappropriate words. Upon a moment’s reflection, however, she sighed in understanding.

“—Are you stealing socks? Or a toothbrush?”

“Ah! No, I’m not referring to anything Darling used.”

Miku quickly shook her head to deny it. That doesn’t seem to be the case.

It made sense upon further reflection, if Miku wanted to steal something of Shido’s, she surely wouldn’t need Origami’s help and could have acted right now. However, if she wanted to prepare alternatives in case Shido found out about it, that was an entirely different matter.

In that regard, the word “steal” has a more dangerous meaning. Miku seemed to have guessed what Origami was thinking from her expression and was quick to clarify:

“It’s not so much ‘stealing’ so much as ‘stealing back.’”

“What happened?”

“Actually...”

Miku exhaled a sigh loudly.



“...Lilac Burglar?”

After school one day, after her own tea-stating, Miku listened to what the girl sitting opposite of her said, all the while, her eyes widening.

“Yes...”

The young girl answered in a fluent Mandarin that didn’t match her appearance.

Her name was Rosalie Welbeck. She was an exchange student visiting Miku at Rindouji All-Girls’ Private School.

With beautiful silk-like blonde hair and fair skin, she had an elegant temperament and education and was a lovely girl in every regard and was the perfect definition of a “deep girl”.

Honestly, it was Miku’s ideal type. However, Miku’s fondness for girls was as wide as the Tokyo Dome. In short, there were many types of girls that could be considered her ideal type.

Going back to the topic at hand, Miku found a cute girl in the school that she hadn’t met before. She was so overjoyed that she immediately invited her to come to her home as a guest and treat her with some delicious refreshments. Despite this, she still looked gloomy.

Upon being asked, Miku suggested the name just now.

“Yes... have you heard of them? They seem to be whipping up a storm in the city lately.”

“Hmm... I think I might have heard of them somewhere, but I don’t know much else...”

After Miku responded, Rosalie frowned slightly and said:

“A few months ago, my family received a threatening letter with the words “Will steal the Rose Girl”... Ah, the Rose Maiden is an heirloom, a precious gem. Of course, my parents thought that the whole thing was just a horrible prank so they didn’t take it seriously.

“So as a result, was it really stolen?”

After Miku asked her question, Rosalie nodded with a pained expression.

“I don’t know how they managed to do it but by the time we realized what happened, the Rose Girl was already stolen out of its box.”

Rosalie bowed her head after she finished speaking; Miku, for her part, looked serious.

“That’s it... I’m really sorry, I didn’t know you encountered such a serious thing, and I leisurely asked you to have afternoon tea...”

Ah, d-don’t say that. I’m actually very grateful for you to invite me. If you hadn’t done something to shift the focus, I’d still be thinking about it and feeling depressed about it. I can’t

keep going on like this. It's rare to be able to come to Japan as an exchange student and I've been worried about this since I came here."

Rosalie smiled and waved weakly but her face sank almost immediately.

Miku did her best not to let the silence linger and immediately spoke in an effort to cheer the other girl up.

"Hmm... What a strange thief who's the one doing the good deed? As long as you stay determined, you should be able to catch and punish him."

"Well..."

After Miku finished speaking, Rosalie responded with an awkward expression on her face.

"Hey? What's wrong with you?"

"N-No... it's nothing."

"Hmm?"

Rosalie's odd behavior made Miku frown as she regarded the foreign exchange student with wonder.

"If you're willing to hear me out, let's talk honestly."

After being questioned by Miku, Rosalie hesitated for a moment, and then said softly, "Actually—"

"I heard that after the lilac burglar stole the Rose Maiden from my family, a Japanese property got a gem very similar to the Rose maiden.

"Huh...? That seems awfully suspicious."

Miku put a hand on her chin as she reflected on this new piece of information. Rosalie clenched her thighs while frowning in an attempt to suppress her anger.

People who go to conventions about these sorts of things upload photos to social networking sites. Someone else is taking credit for my Rose Maiden that's been a part of my family...!"

"Huh? Are you saying that you think that this bourgeoisie person might be the lilac burglar?"

"I don't know. However, I don't think it has anything to do with him. All I know is that the Rose Maiden is with him."

"Is that right... did you tell the police about this?"

“I tried... but the police simply ignored me because there was no evidence.”

Rosalie gritted her teeth unwillingly and lowered her head as tears dripped from her eyes onto the table.

“Rose Maiden isn’t just a beautiful gem but it’s also an important treasure passed down from generation to generation... but...”

“Rosalie-san...”

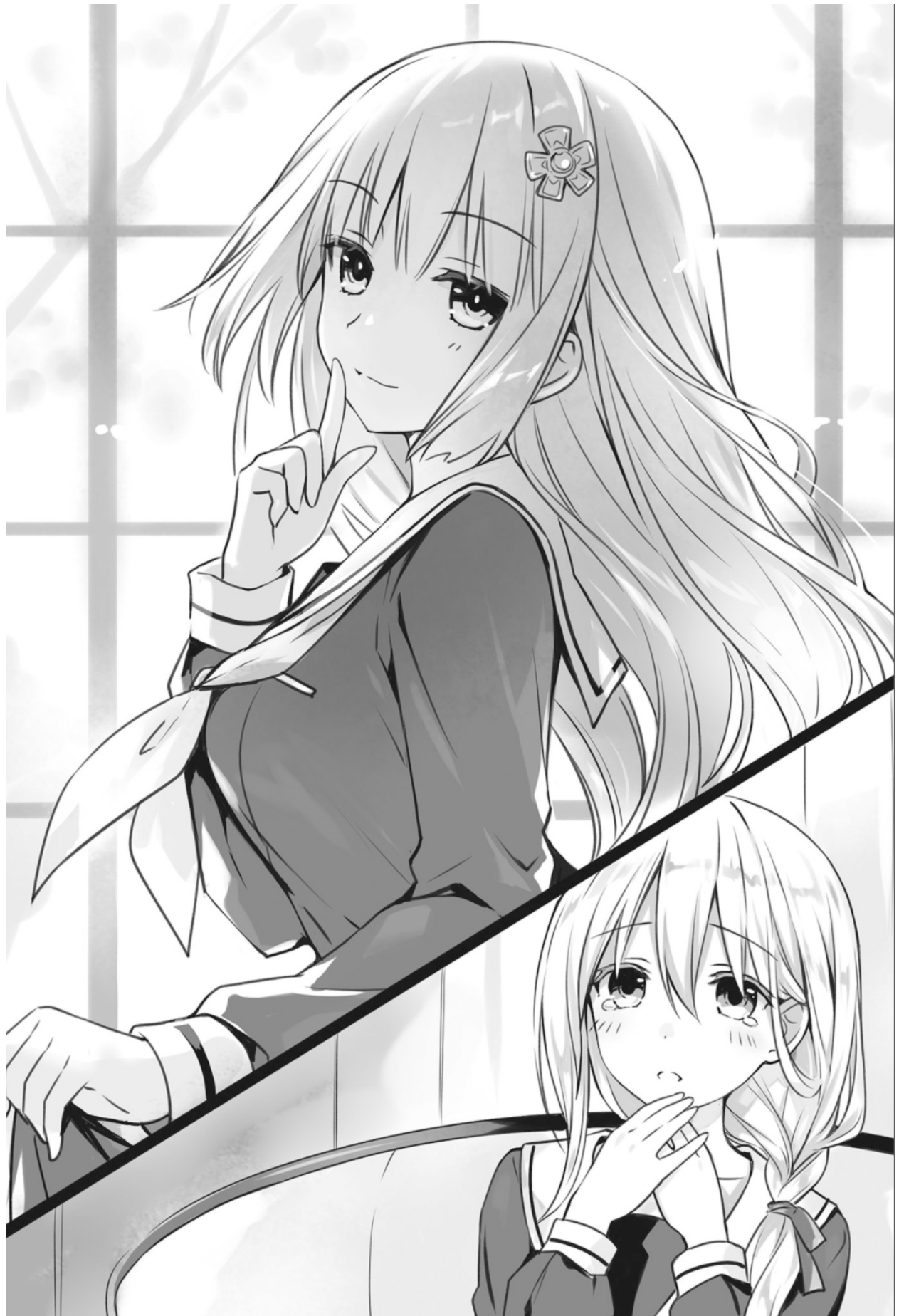
Miku looked at Rosalie with compassion. Soon after, her gaze sharpened and became more determined as she held Rosalie’s trembling hand.

That’s right. It was a well known fact that Izayoi Miku always got emotional when she spotted a crying girl’s face. But the thought of Miku making a girl cry could simply not be allowed. How could she leave the sad and crying girl in front of her alone?

“Please leave it to me! I’ll help you get back your Rose Maiden!”

“Huh...?”

After Miku spoke, Rosalie’s eyes widened in surprise.



“Get it back... what exactly do you plan to do?”

“Hehehe...”

Miku smiled mischievously as she turned around, her skirt fluttering in the breeze while her index finger touched her lips in a seductive manner.

“Did you know? There’s more to idols than meets the eye.”



“...And that’s what happened.”

After listening to her story, Origami stared blankly at Miku.

“I understand what happened. So what price did you ask of her in order to get back the Rose maiden?”

“A kiss on my cheek... No, wait, I just wanted to help Rosalie-san!”

Despite her true desires slipping out, Miku argued fiercely... however, it was clear that she seemed to ask for something in return.

Origami sighed softly as she put a hand to her chin in thought.

“The Lilac Burglar...”

“The burglar seems to go by that moniker, yes. Have you heard of them?”

“I have. I remember the names of several unsolved serial burglar suspects.”

“Oooh! To be expected of Origami! However, is there really such a strange thief in this day and age?”

What Miku just said was not something someone who wanted to become a thief would say. Origami felt conflicted but still answered:

“Because of influence from the media, there are many burglars who give themselves strange names, hence “strange thieves”. Sometimes, the media may also jokingly use that term to refer to prisoners who use ingenious ways to commit crimes.”

“Is that true?”

“Yes. In addition to the Lilac Burglar mentioned before, there are plenty of other burglars that use similar titles like Wisteria Burglar, Rose Burglar, and Swift Burglars among others that haven’t been arrested yet.”

“Uh... was that last person meant as a homophonic joke?”

“There’s no use asking me about it.”

After Origami spoke lightly, Miku shook her head and continued to speak.

“In short, I can’t forgive such a crime! An eye for an eye! A theft for a theft! Origami and I will help her get the Rose Maiden back! I’ve already thought of a team name! The association of the words Night and Kite makes for a strange thief <Night Kite>!”

“Why drag me into this situation?”

“Huh? Because it would be dangerous to do such a thing alone. Plus, the other party is very rich so it’s likely that they would have a bunch of anti-theft devices installed in their mansion...”

“Why not go to <Ratatoskr>?”

“Well I thought about this option... but if Kotori-san were to find out about it, she would tell everyone not to get involved in such a dangerous thing. However, if it was Origami-san, then it might be easier to talk.”

“...”

Miku’s so-called “more than meets the eye” was simply to ask others for help? Origami sighed softly.

“Sorry. I refuse. Find someone else to help you.”

“Oh! But why?!”

Miku’s eyes widened at Origami’s unexpected response. Origami continued to tinker with the parts while answering: “That gem is based on the exchange student’s testimony. It’s too risky to act just on this alone. More to the point, I have no reason to accept it.”

“Aaaah! But there are cute girls crying! Wouldn’t your heart bleed at the thought!”

“I think she’s pathetic and I have no intention of being a burglar for someone I’ve never even met before.”

“It’s not being a thief, it’s righteous theft <Night—>!”

“It’s the same under criminal law.”

“I-I know... I’ll change the name to “Kite Night” head office!”

“How is there a difference?”

After Origami finished speaking indifferently, Miku puffed out her cheeks in dissatisfaction. At that moment, she seemed to remember something and the corners of her mouth turned up into a smile.

“Oh, that’s right, Origami. You said it before. Because the world has changed, many photos of Darling have been lost.”

“—!”

Hearing what Miku said, Origami frowned slightly.

Miku spotted her reaction sharply and her smile broadened.

“Hehehe... Actually, do you have a video of Darling in your collection that you can watch?”

Origami raised her head without saying a word.

“—Strange thief “Night Kite” will execute justice.”

“Yay! Origami! I love you!”

Miku twisted her body and made a joyful cry.

As a result—

“Ah! I heard your conversation.”

The next moment, a noise came from the entrance of the living room.

“...?”

“Yes, who is?”

Looking around for a moment, they spotted a woman with short hair who didn’t know when to appear. She crossed her arms and leaned against the wall while striking an inexplicable pose.

It was Honjou Nia, a Spirit much like Miku and Origami. It seems that she’d come to the Itsuka household while they’d been talking.

“—Nia.”

“I was really scared for a moment, but it turned out to be Nia-san.”

Miku sighed helplessly while Nia pursed her lips, unconvinced.

“Eh, what’s with that reaction? Couldn’t you be just a little more surprised?”

“I *was* surprised... by the way, did you hear what Origami just said? If you can keep it a secret from Kotori-san, it’d make us very happy.”

After Miku spoke, Nia nodded her head impressively.

“I understand. I won’t tell anyone. Instead, I’ll be a partner in <Midnight Kite>.”

“...?”

“What?”

Origami and Miku were stunned for a moment before they realized what Nia meant.

In other words, she would help keep their plan a secret but only on the condition that she was allowed to join them. She even went so far as to change the team name to one that sounded more impressive.

“It’s too cruel to keep me from participating in such an interesting thing.”

Nia exclaimed as her eyes glowed and sparkled with excitement.

From this perspective, it would be useless to refuse her. If they refused her, she would no doubt tell Kotori about their plans. Origami and Miku winked at each other and quickly exchanged judgements.

“I see. However, this task is going to be very dangerous so you have to obey my instructions.”

Of course! Oh, I really want to try! I say, should I prepare a notice?”

“No. I don’t see any reason why you’d want to alert the other party.”

“Hey Is this a romance?”

Nia pursed her lips. Origami ignored her and suddenly stood up.

“Anyway, now that it’s been decided, we must draw up a battle plan. Shido and the others will be home any moment now. We should go somewhere else to discuss it further.”

“Okay! I understand!”

“It’s time to move to the secret base!”

Miku and Nia replied excitedly.

Origami nodded slightly as she put a lid on the small electronic components she’d been tinkering with before setting it behind a potted plant and left the living room.

Miku and Nia stared at her motion dumbly but they immediately let out an “Ahhhhh” as they understood her intentions. They promptly fell silent as they followed her.



A few days later:

On a small hill overlooking the city’s suburbs was a large mansion. It was at this mansion that three figures appeared.

“...”

One of these figures was Origami who was taking note of what they were up against with this mansion. She wore a black camouflage suit, a lightweight bulletproof vest that blended well with the darkness, and a headset equipped with various sensors like infrared sight.

“Hehehe. The vigilante is here to deliver justice and punish evil where it hides!”

The other person was Miku who struck a handsome pose with her back to the moon. She was dressed very differently from Origami. She didn’t understand why Miku was wearing a men’s outfit complete with cape, top hat, and a monocle over her right eye. Not only was it inconvenient, it would surely draw attention to herself.

“Humming gaze♪...”

The last one either forgot the lyrics or didn’t want to deal with royalties while humming the same song vaguely was Nia.

Nia’s outfit was as strange as Miku’s as she wore a blue tight suit all over her body and a yellow cloth wrapped around her waist like a salon worker. Additionally, she held what looked to be a calling card in her fingertips.

“—Why are you two dressed like that?”

Origami asked softly. Miku waved her cape proudly while Nia puffed out her chest.

“It’s worthy of Origami! It’s such a golden eye! When it comes to strange thieves, this is the style!”

“No, no, Miku. When it comes to strange thieves, it has to be my outfit—!”

Halfway through her sentence, Nia sneezed. It was hardly a surprise. After all, under the winter night sky, she was only wearing a thin tight suit so it made perfect sense that she would end up being cold.

“Regardless of practicality, I can understand Miku’s intentions behind her outfit; I don’t understand Nia’s outfit at all.”

“That’s right. Why do robbers wear tights? Ah! Wouldn’t it be a reward for others? If that’s the case, just say it sooner. Come on, this cloak is very warm.”

After Origami and Miku finished speaking, Nia trembled with her eyes wide.

“Ehhh... Are the two of you really serious? Dammit... is the generation gap at work? However, I can’t agree with that! It has to be Maurice Leblanc who is relatively old!”

Nia stomped her feet, and then sneezed a lot: “Hello! Damnit!”

“Also, what is with that card?”

Origami asked, pointing to the card in Nia’s hand. It had a stylish emblem made of a book, the moon, and birds with the words “Midnight Kite” in neat text.

“Huh? You only just noticed? This is a calling card. You have to leave this behind, otherwise how will others know who is responsible?”

“It’s unnecessary. Why would you want to intentionally leave traces of a crime?”

“Oh? Well...”

Nia wanted to answer with a natural flair but upon thinking about it for a moment, she could only laugh dryly.

“...Why is this?”

“...”

Origami pinched her temples without saying another word.

—She clearly instructed them to bring equipment that was appropriate for sneaking in. How did it turn out like this?

However, this setback wasn’t going to stop her from completing the operation today. Origami rummaged through the backpack she’d brought and pulled out the equipment she’d prepared in advance.

“Anyway, you two should also wear these.”

“Origami, what is this?”

“Night vision goggles.”

“Hey It doesn’t feel like being a thief...”

Miku said, dissatisfied. However, after folding the night vision goggles and forcing them onto the two, Origami went on to say:

“According to our plans, we have to make three holes to begin sneaking in. Everyone, for the sake of insurance, please make sure to confirm the time with each other.”

“Ah, is this okay?”

“Yeah yeah.”

After listening to what Origami said, Miku pulled a pocket watch from her pocket while Nia pulled out her cell phone from the chest of her tights while striking a sexy pose.

“...”

Origami stared silently at the two of them for several seconds before passing the watches she’d prepared over to the two of them.



“... What is it?”

Ajitsu Kenzo made an impatient noise as he stared at the servants in the monitoring room. He was a man in his sixties. His short body and white hair were his most prominent features. His face was weather-beaten but despite his age, his eyes were extremely sharp, revealing his extraordinary experience. His fierce stare made one of the maids shudder while letting out a terrified scream.

However, it was not a surprise that Ajitsu would be upset. If anyone woke up by a sudden alarm bell in their sleep, they’d also be upset.

Unfortunately, he couldn’t just ignore it. Because the alarm bell sounded, that meant a disturbing situation occurred.

“It looks like there are trespassers, sir. The sensors just responded. Someone must have broken into this house!”

“...An intruder?”

The maid explained the situation through the monitor. After hearing the explanation, Ajitsu’s eyes widened and his previously drowsy mind immediately came to full awakeness.

“Where! How many people? Pull up the monitors immediately!”

“O-Okay!”

The maid frantically operated the console while Ajitsu squinted and sighed angrily.

Although he didn’t know who it was, Ajitsu suspected that the people who broke into his mansion were after the treasures that he’d collected throughout his life.

“Abominable...”

Ajitsu muttered angrily as he opened the hard aluminum box in his hand. Inside the box was a beautiful gem that was a rose-shaped pink diamond. It had many fascinating charms, making it impossible for any viewer to see them all.

This gem was called the Rose Maiden which was a treasure that Ajitsu finally acquired a while ago. His house also boasted countless other gold and silver treasures. However, just from judging the timing of the break-in, Ajitsu suspected that the Rose Maiden was what they were after.

“Abominable yet so brave. I don’t know who you are, I will never let you succeed...!”

“...Master, I found it! I will bring it up on screen right away!”

The maid’s voice could be heard throughout the monitoring room. Ajitsu looked thoughtfully at the screen in front of him.

Three figures were moving forward through the air vents. One of them was wearing equipment suited for the special forces, but the other two were wearing men’s clothing and tights.

Additionally, all three thieves were young girls. Ajitsu immediately thought the three were sending mixed impressions just from the way they were dressed.

“What are these girls doing?”

“Are they... cosplaying?”

Seeing such unexpected images, the expressions of Ajitsu and his servants appeared confused.

However, Ajitsu quickly shook his head and refocused on the image.

“A-Anyway, it doesn’t matter who it is, an intruder is an intruder. Right now—”

“O-oops, it’s so late, it’s really messy...”

At that moment—

Before Ajitsu could finish speaking, the monitoring room sounded such a voice. The servants' shoulders twitched in fright. Looking around, they spotted a European American man who did not seem to realize where he was standing.

He was roughly 190 cm tall, had thin cheeks, slender hands and fingers, and looked like dead wood.

“Braque! You’re here!”

Ajitsu called out the man’s name as he recognized the figure.

—Lenard Braque. He was Ajitsu’s bodyguard and the man Ajitsu trusted above all others.

“You’ve heard that there are intruders, right! They must be after the Rose Maiden...!”

“Okay, okay. Calm down. Don’t worry.”

“But...!”

After Ajitsu shouted, Braque bent his thin lips into a smile the shape of the crescent moon.

“Or perhaps, do you not still believe in my wizard’s powers, Lenard Braque?”

“...!”

Ajitsu’s breath caught in his throat when he heard what Braque had said.

That’s right. This man was not an ordinary human but rather, a superhuman who was known as a “wizard” and tended to deviate from the norm.

Admittedly, Ajitsu didn’t believe in the existence of wizards in the beginning but there was no denying that his power was real.

State run museums, vaults of big banks, and mansions of the wealthy and nobles around the world: in a sort of magical way, he was able to steal the art, gold, and silver jewelry that Ajitsu wanted from various facilities that are said to be protected by walls made of copper and iron.

Lenard Braque—Also known as the Lilac burglar. He was the rarest “Magic Thief” in modern times.

“Y-yes, I don’t have to worry about anything now that you’re here.”

“That’s true, but I don’t even need to do anything at all!”

After speaking, Braque faced the large center screen mounted on the wall.

Unlike the monitor screen, the floor plan of the house is displayed above and there were red marks lit everywhere.

“Although I don’t know where the thief came from, it’s still very stupid. The anti-theft devices and traps will be irritating for them. They may think that they managed to sneak in undetected... but it’s just like the proverb: like a moth to a flame.”

“So that’s what you meant...”

Ajitsu calmed down when he heard what Braque said.

It’s true that many dangerous traps were set up in the corridors of the Ajitsu household. It was prudent to say good things but unwise to say it badly. It was the combination of Ajitsu’s personality and the various legal and illegal traps prepared by Braque that have turned this mansion into a solid fortress.

“Well, those thieves are about to enter the first trap zone. Let’s enjoy it here leisurely. If you’re lucky, we might have a survivor.”

U-Uh... that’s the same. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

Braque briefed him on the situation calmly while Ajitsu began to laugh after listening to what he had to say.



“—Wait a minute.”

Having broken into the house through a ventilation shaft left Origami in a dark aisle and so she suddenly stopped, stopping the other two behind her.

“? What happened?”

“Hmm Has something happened?”

Miku and Nia asked, puzzled, while poking their heads from either side of Origami and taking note of the scene in front of them, prompting a note of surprise out of both of them.

This was no surprise because through the night vision goggles, they could make out several red lines drawn in their field of vision.

“It’s so cool! Is this the so-called infrared sensor?”

“Wow, I got to see one for the first time. These are the ones that will trigger an alarm if you touch it a little.”

“It’s okay to trigger the alarm to avoid triggering other more dangerous traps.”

Origami explained, staring at the left and right walls, then the floor and ceiling. It seems to cover up well, but it looks unnatural without any flaws.

“Other traps... what exactly do you mean by that?”

“For example, if it hits infrared light, it will emit a laser light from the wall; or if you try to avoid an infrared light, you could activate the floor’s weight sensor and fall through a trap hole—and so on.”

“Well, isn’t it fine, then?”

“...”

Origami continued to observe their surroundings, she then backtracked a few paces and squatted down on the spot. The wall under her foot revealed an electrical outlet similar to the one the maids used to plug in a vacuum cleaner.

Origami rummaged through her bag and produced a cord which she then plugged into the outlet. The next moment, with a crackling sound, the sparks sputtered everywhere, and the infrared rays that originally covered the path ahead suddenly disappeared.

“Yeah!”

“Wow!”

“—Run now, while you have the chance ‘

Time was running out and Origami moved as fast as she could. Miku and Nia were one step behind her before they managed to catch up.

Just as the three of them passed through the long passage, a low buzzing hum sound met their ears.

“Whew... Hey Don’t be so sudden...”

“That scared me... what did you do?”

They asked while trying to catch their breath. Origami nodded gently and replied:

“I shorted the power supply which caused a temporary power outage in the house. The inductive power supply there was shared with the power supply in the house.

After Origami finished her explanation, Miku and Nia stared at Origami with newfound admiration.

“That’s so cat-like. But if the power supply is disconnected, what are we going to do?”

“Although I’m not 100% sure, I guess the other party didn’t think too carefully. Speaking of which, the enemy who would want to set up such a trap is watching too many movies.”

“Ahaha, your mouth really is poisonous!”

Nia laughed uproariously. At this moment, Miku made a sound as if she realized something:

“Ah, but that’s what we did just now, wouldn’t the people in the room already be able to find us?”

“It’s very likely that the other party already discovered our presence a long time ago—when we snuck into the house, it should be impossible for Miku and Nia to completely miss the sensors.”

“Huh!”

“Ohh”

The two pressed their chests and twisted their bodies in alarm. However, Origami’s expression remained indifferent as she faced forward.

“—If you don’t pay attention, there will be enemies. Don’t be negligent and follow me.”

After Origami finished speaking, they took off yet again.



“It was easily broken!”

Ajitsu wailed in the deepest monitoring room in the mansion.

It was no surprise. After only a few seconds of power outage, the intruders on screen managed to pass the first trap zone.

While that had happened, Braque was still at Ajitsu’s side.

“Hehehe... That’s it, there seems to be two brushes...”

“What are you laughing at! What are you going to do about this?!”

“Master, please calm down. What’s the matter, anyway? That trap was nothing more than a basic demonstration.”

“What...?”

“You should know best about how many bodyguards are in this house, right?”

“T-That’s true...”

After hearing Braque’s words, Ajitsu calmed his fury.

Braque was right: This mansion had more than fifty bodyguards on standby. And these bodyguards weren’t mere hooligans or fools. These are all people who have learned many fighting techniques or self-defense skills. Surely, they’d be able to subdue the intruder immediately.

“Right? Usually they get to eat and drink for free, so occasionally they should have to work hard. After catching them and forcing them to recruit behind-the-scenes instructors, they will be at your disposal. At first glance, all three of them are young women. Do you hate it, sir?”

“Huh? Right...”

Ajitsu capped his chin, stared again at the intruder displayed on the screen, and raised a corner of his mouth with an evil smile.



The three of them managed to get through the trap zone quietly but moved as quickly as possible through the dark corridors of Ajitsu’s house.

Aside from where they’d just come, they hadn’t encountered any new traps. However, that was to be expected after all: this wasn’t just a vault dedicated to protecting jewelry but a home where people lived and worked. If traps were set up everywhere, it would affect daily life as well.

“By the way, Origami. Do you know where the Rose Maiden is?”

Nia’s voice came from behind.

“—From the structure of the floor plan I obtained beforehand, I can probably guess its location. But I am afraid it is in the host’s bedroom, where there is a vault.”

“That’s it? Then we are heading to that bedroom?”

Miku asked after a moment’s thought.

However, Origami shook her head in the negative.

“Where we are going now is the monitoring room that manages the security. Now that the owner knows that there’s an intruder present, the owner would most likely move to the place where most people would gather and may cause a complete lockdown at the same time, trapping us.”

“They would probably take the treasure with them. Even if the other party doesn’t evacuate there, as long as we can capture the monitoring room, the other party will not know our actions.”

After Origami talked lightly, Miku and Nia again expressed their admiration.

It was at that moment—

“...!”

Origami held her breath quietly and stopped on the spot.

The reason was obvious: because the lights suddenly turned on and a group of men in black emerged from the other end of the corridor.

“Hey!”

“Ah! A dirty man!”

Nia and Origami shouted loudly. Origami just took a single step back and without saying a word, lowering her center of gravity, and straining cautiously at the men in black.

Spotting this, the men in black also assumed a fighting stance.

“I thought they were just joking, but it really is a woman! I guess it was exaggerated, like a manga or something.”

A man in a black suit who’d taken the lead looked at Origami and smiled scornfully.

“Let me ask for a moment, ladies, do you want to get hold of yourself? Although it is not guaranteed for the future, at least it can make your lovely faces less hurt.”

“...”

“Is it? That’s so interesting.”

While Origami analyzed the enemy’s combat power silently, the man in black clenched his fists and placed them in front of his chest.

Boxing? No, such a stance for boxing wasn’t natural. It would be more accurate to say that it was either judo or wrestling. The other party pretended to be fighting, but it was actually intended to try to paralyze them.

Origami could make the subtle obscurities in the man's posture—this man had a lot of experience in fighting. Origami frowned and rethought her strategy.

If it was one-on-one, there were plenty of ways she could deal with him. However, she also had to protect Nia and Miku and there was more than just the one man in black that she had to deal with at the same time.

As Origami continued to think of a solution, she suddenly felt someone put a hand on her shoulder. It was Miku.

“Just leave it for someone else to deal with.”

Miku finished talking and waved her cloak with a flourish. Origami looked puzzled but her eyebrows remained furrowed.

“These aren't opponents you can beat in a fight. At least take a step back and make sure they can't take you hostage.”

Even as Origami said so, Miku didn't step back but instead gently said:

“No problem, just wait there for a bit, and remember to cover your ears.”

“...”

“Ah”

Origami and Nia both figured out Miku's intentions and nodded at once, covering their ears with both hands.

Miku took a step forward and took a big breath—

“_____ ♪”

She sang a lullaby to the men in black.



“W-W-What...”

Ajitsu stared at the screen in the monitoring room, stunned. This was understandable: after all, one of the intruder girls moved like a singer, and then the bodyguards all fell down all at the same time.

“What the hell is going on Braque! How the hell did this happen?”

Ajitsu was screaming hysterically as he watched the scene unfold. However, Braque remained calm but he stared at the screen with greater interest while stroking his chin.

“Well, they probably used a type of hypnotic gas. Though judging from the fact that they didn’t wear equipment like a gas mask, it could be a directional jet device...”

“Now’s not the time to be uttering such nonsense!”

Ajitsu growled angrily. Braque could only shrug with a wry smile.

“Weren’t you the one who asked me what happened?”

“Shit! The point is, what are you going to do now?! Both the traps and the bodyguards are useless!”

“Hey, it looks like there’s nothing you can do. It just means that the other party is slightly better.”

Braque said while scratching his head. Seeing his relaxed composure, Ajitsu wanted to growl again but he managed to hold it in at the last second.

It was because Braque pressed something similar to a military card to his forehead and his body shone with a faint light.

“What...”

In the face of the unexpected situation, Ajitsu was taken aback. Braque, who’d changed his appearance in an instant, held his chest up, as though showing off his new mechanical armor.

“Since none of the previous methods managed to resolve the problem, there’s no way other than to let me handle this myself. Of course, you’ll be paying me a special bonus for doing this.”

“No, is it really okay? Didn’t you just say that the other party has hypnotic gas...?”

At that moment, Ajitsu stopped speaking.

Because of Braque’s evil smile, he felt like he was being pushed by a ghost and his body couldn’t move at all.

“...!”

“Haha, sorry, sorry. That was a bit overkill.”

Braque said happily, and at the same time, Ajitsu’s body was able to move again.

“...Was it a good thing that you did that...?”

“Yes. Do you understand a little bit after that? Fighting? Hypnotic gas? Haha! That kind of thing is as good as a three-legged cat in front of a wizard’s Territory.”

Braque opened his hands exaggeratedly and continued.

“Not to brag or anything, but I’m also a well-known wizard in DEM. As long as the opponent is not a Spirit, there’s no way I’m going to lose this battle. You just need to be like a villain, holding a brandy in one hand and waiting for the cat in one hand.”

Braque said jokingly.

His relaxed attitude seemed reliable in Ajitsu’s eyes.

“Hmm... in that case, I’ll leave it to you, Braque.”

“No problem.”

The wizard Lenard Braque listened to Ajitsu’s voice behind him as he left the monitoring room.



“—Don’t move.”

As soon as the door to the monitoring room was opened, Origami warned Miku and Nia who entered the room behind her.

“Drink! Strange Thieves ‘Midnight Kite!’”

“Appear here!”

After speaking, the two struck impressive poses. Because the two were posing on either side of Origami, it looked like Origami was striking a pose of her own.

Hmm... as far as poses went, there was nothing wrong with them. Origami immediately went back to thinking as she looked carefully around the room.



In the room with several screens, she could see several servants and an old man. This old man must be the owner of this mansion, Ajitsu Kenzo.

“What...!”

Ajitsu stared at Origami in disbelief as he began trembling in terror.

“Why are you here! B-Braque!”

“Braque? Who’s that?”

“Isn’t that the guy? The guy who just came out.”

“Ah. The one Origami managed to beat in ten seconds...”

“Br-Braque!”

Nia and Miku talked as though they were gossiping while Ajitsu shouted with his eyes wide open.

“However, it really scared me. Isn’t he a wizard?”

“It’s DEM Industries, who came to earn some extra money. I’ve heard that the wizards who are ranked low in the company are not expected to fight in the war against the Spirits. Instead, they work to support DEM-related politicians and donors. Even wizards with minimal strength are more than enough to pose a dangerous threat to an average person.”

“Now I feel so bad...”

“That is to say it seems like if they are ignored by people in the same age group, they just run to the elementary school students and proclaim themselves king among the elementary school students.”

Miku and Nia whispered slightly louder and, for some reason, Ajitsu’s expression was shocked.

“—However, a wizard is still a wizard, and it makes things a little bit harder for me.”

Origami whispered softly while Ajitsu looked at the hard aluminum box in his hand.

“Ajitsu Kenzo, hand over the Rose Maiden!”

Origami ordered, taking a threatening step forward.

“D-Don’t move!”

Ajitsu shook his shoulders and pulled something resembling a small remote control from his pocket.

“I-I will never hand it over to anyone! The Rose Maiden will always belong to me! Rather than let it be snatched by you, I’ll just blow it up here and now!”

“Hey! What do you think you’re doing? If you do that, you’d just kill yourself!”

“Hahahaha! Whatever you say!”

“...”

Origami’s eyes narrowed while Miku and Nia continued talking.

The distance between Origami who was close to the door of the room and Ajitsu who was deep in the room was about five minutes visually. Although Origami could shorten the distance in an instance, it wasn’t nearly enough time to reach him before he pressed the button on the remote control.

All she needed was a second, if Nia and Miku could distract the other person—

Just as Origami was thinking of a plan at that moment:

“Agh!”

Something suddenly crossed her field of vision, and Ajitsu was left clutching his hand while making a painful noise.

Although she had no idea what happened, Origami didn’t let go of such an opportunity. She immediately rushed to close the distance and kicked the remote away from Ajitsu’s hand and they watched as it clattered to the floor.

“What...!”

Origami lowered her center of gravity with and with a single fluid movement, kicked Ajitsu as hard as she could in his heart.

“Wait... I won’t let you snatch... the Rose Maiden...!”

Ajitsu spat out a painful sound before he slumped forward onto the ground, unconscious.

Origami noticed the scared servants’ movements with the little light in the room as she opened the hard aluminum box that Ajitsu originally held and confirmed that the target gem was still inside.

“...? Isn’t this—”

At that moment, Origami spotted a card on the ground beside Ajitsu who was still unconscious.

—It has the emblem of “Midnight Kite” on it.

“Hey, Origami? These things sure come in handy, huh?”

Nia said so proudly. It seems that she was the one who shot the card and bought Origami the time she needed to recover the gem.

“Yeah! Nia, you’re so cool! You shoot so well!”

“Hey, continue praising me... Actually, it’s pretty difficult to shoot accurately, I just made a gap on the edge of the card and shot it with a rubber band. It’s like playing with a used phone card before. What’s with that face? Don’t tell me you don’t even know what a phone card is!”

After she finished talking, Nia stretched the rubber band on her hand, released it, and shook her hand slightly. It all seemed very painful.

Origami crouched down and picked up the cards before returning to Miku and Nia.

“—It helped me out a lot. I don’t think the card was useless.”

“Hehe Just keep it in mind!...Strange, why are you taking the card away?”

Nia proudly raised her chest and then noticed that the card was in Origami’s hand, prompting her to tilt her head in confusion.

“I don’t want to leave any traces of our crimes. Miku, is there a way to use the “singing voice” to erase the memory of everyone in the house about what happened tonight?”

“”Oh! That’s it! Let’s try it! However, it is not effective for unconscious people. It is useful only when the sleeping people are awake...”

“It doesn’t matter. They’re all tied up now so it’s not like they’re going anywhere. It looks like they have stolen a lot of other things too. Why don’t we just throw them out on the porch and call the police to keep them quiet.”

With Origami and Miku saying so, Nia waved her hands in dissatisfaction.

—As a result, the first appearance of “Midnight Kite” (there is no plan for the next appearance) is coming to an almost perfect crime.



The next day:

“— Here you are, Rosalie-san. Can you confirm this is it?”

Miku brought Rosalie to her home and placed the Rose Maiden that was recovered from Ajitsu’s house on the table.

“...! M-Miku-san...! How did you get it back...!”

Rosalie, who was sitting across the table from her, covered her mouth with her hands, her face the perfect picture of shock. Miku smiled proudly and answered:

“Hahaha Didn’t I tell you before? There’s more to an idol than meets the eye! Ah, you’ll have to keep this a secret.”

After Miku finished, Rosalie nodded and promised with tears streaming down her face.

“Thank you, thank you... I never expected Rose Maiden to return to me...”

“Ah! Don’t cry! I just got it back for you to make you happy. It doesn’t make sense to cry now!”

After Miku said this in a joking manner, Rosalie wiped away her tears and burst into the brightest smile Miku had seen from her. When she saw this, Miku couldn’t help but smile.

But immediately after this, her expression turned serious, her breathing quickened, and her fingers began moving quickly.

“So come on, Rosalie-san. You promised that you would...”

“Eh? Ah—”

Rosalie’s eyes widened instantly, and then she blushed as if she realized Miku’s intentions.

“Okay... I see. But is it really possible?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

Hearing Rosalie’s meaningful words, Miku tilted her head in confusion. As a result, Rosalie curled her hair in a sexy motion and approached Miku slowly.

She then whispered softly in her ear:

“—Is a kiss on your cheek really all you want?”

The image of Rosalie who was so pure was amazing and Miku’s eyes widened in panic.

All the same, Rosalie licked her lips and said:

“Miku-san, could you please close your eyes?”

“O-Okay!”

It was an immediate role reversal of offense and defense. Normally, Miku liked to attack beautiful girls but she also loved being played with by them. She followed Rosalie’s instructions, and all the while, her expression suddenly became more charming as she closed her eyes.



“Origami! Nia!”

The next day following their clash with the burglar, Origami was busy pasting the newly acquired pictures of Shido in an album in the Itsuka household living room. Miku rolled in with a loud noise.

“What are you doing?”

“Um, Miku, what’s wrong?”

Origami and Nia, who’d only just arrived as well, wondered aloud.

Therefore, Miku even forgot to adjust her breathing and quickly said:

“B-B-Being stolen! Rose Maiden...!”

“What is going on?”

“Oh! Don’t tell me that Ajitsu somehow managed to steal it again? Wasn’t he already arrested by the police?”

After origami and Nia started asking, Miku shook her head vigorously and pulled out a card and put it on the table.

“T-This! You see this?!”

“...?”

Origami and Nia were questioning as they took a closer look at the card.

Then their eyes widened in amazement.

The Rose Maiden, I accept it.

Thank you, Miku onee-sama!♡

Rose Thief.

Because the card had the sentence written above and the rose symbol.

“Miku, where did this card come from?”

“It’s Rosalie! Rosalie asked me to close my eyes, but nothing happened. If nothing happens, does that still count as playing? After opening my eyes slightly, I found that Rose Maiden was gone, leaving on this card...!”

“...”

After listening to the perfect mess, Origami narrowed her eyes silently.

The next moment, there was a brisk call from a mobile phone.

“Ah!”

It seems to be the sound of Miku’s cell phone. Miku took out her phone and looked at the screen—a more shocked expression on her face.

“R-Rosalie!”

“...!”

Origami raised an eyebrow while Miku quickly pressed the call button and put the phone to her ear.

“Hey, hello! Rosalie-san! What’s going on! Didn’t you promise to give a kiss to my cheek—?”

“Give me that.”

Origami interrupted Miku, grabbing her smartphone from her.

“Hey.”

“—Ah, hey? Great, there is someone who understands people.”

After Origami answered the phone, a female voice came from the microphone. The way of speaking is slightly different from the simple deep boudoir described by Miku.

“Are you Miss Tobiichi Origami? Former AST? Thank you very much for your help this time.”

It seemed that the other party knew Origami. Origami thought for a moment before making a sound.

“Are you the wizard who used me to defeat that DEM wizard and then take advantage of the situation?”

After Origami finished speaking, Rosalie whistled in surprise.

“That’s awesome. I only gave you such a message and you were able to figure out basically everything.”

Even though the thief was complimenting her, there was nothing to be happy about. Origami frowned slightly.

—Welbeck Rosalie, also known as the Rose thief, had been following Ajitsu’s Rose Maiden but knew that his family had an extraordinary human - a wizard - at his command.

She could only guess that it was to knock him down that she deliberately approached Origami—a former member of the AST—through Miku. Then Rosalie continued, aware that Origami was still listening:

“Ah, don’t worry. The Rose Maiden is really something that was stolen from my family, it wasn’t just a calling card or something. Isn’t it embarrassing to have something stolen by your peers? However, the existence of a so-called wizard? Normal people don’t have a chance of beating it.”

Rosalie smiled heartily.

“I originally wanted to use you as bait so that I could get it back myself. However, I didn’t expect you to steal it back for me. I really admire you. If there’s a problem in the future, I would like to be able to ask you for help.”

“...”

Since Origami remained silent, Rosalie filled with a short laugh.

“Don’t be so angry! Anyway, can you tell the other two that I said hello? Thanks, goodbye!”

After finishing what she had to say, Rosalie promptly hung up.

Origami sighed softly and threw the phone back to Miku.

“Ah! Rosalie-san! We’re not done here yet! You have to kiss my cheek! It’s no use refusing to answer the phone!”

Miku grasped at the phone while speaking angrily into the microphone. It seemed that for Miku, not getting the kiss on the cheek was more important to her than Rosalie's true identity.

“...”

Origami, in order to suppress her impatience in her heart, sat back down on the sofa and went back to work on her Shido photo album again.

At the same time, Nia looked at the strange calling card with the rose emblem with interest and whispered, “Cool... of course, a thief would leave a calling card.”

Mikie Measurement

“Ahhh... I feel so nervous!”

Okamine Mikie curled her petite body in an effort to both make herself look smaller and less noticeable and to stop the trembling.

This sort of reaction was understandable because there were several wizards in front of her.

—She was at the Japan Ground Self Defense Force base in the corner of Tengu City.

The JGSDF base was the usual place for the Anti-Spirit Team: AST so it made sense for many wizards to gather there. However, there seemed to be more of them present in the halls today than usual. It was a scene that Mikie had never seen before.

She looked around uneasily, her twin-tailed hair twitching.

Suddenly, she felt something hit her head.

“Ow!”

“Don’t curl up like that! Stand up straight! Don’t flinch!”

Immediately afterward, she heard a crisp voice from somewhere above her. Mikie tenderly rubbed her face before looking up at the speaker.

The speaker was a tall woman wearing a wiring suit similar to the one that Mikie was wearing. Her black hair was tied back in a ponytail. She was the captain who led Mikie’s unit: Captain Kusakabe Ryouko.

“B-But, captain...”

“Don’t do that. If this is how you act now, what will you do in an actual fight?”

“Yeah... that’s true. But ever since I was a kid, I would always get terribly nervous whenever I had to take a quiz or an exam.”

Mikie crossed her arms and sighed.

That’s right. Right now, there was a group of wizards gathered in the training grounds of the JGSDF base not to fight or to participate in a rally—but to take the wizard ability exam.

Just from a single glance, it was clear that it wasn’t just the AST members who were participating today.

There were many wizards gathered in the training fields. Each of them wore wiring suits that had different styles from the ones that Mikie was familiar with. Sometimes, talented wizards were allowed specialized equipment, but the number of wizards present today was too high for that. It was as if all of these people were from different units than Mikie.

“Who are those people? Are they from other bases...?”

“What are you talking about? Those are DEM wizards.”

Ryouko shrugged helplessly while Mikie gasped in realization, eyes widening.

The organization called DEM was a military company headquartered in the United Kingdom. This company was responsible for inventing the Realizer Manifestation Device that Mikie and the AST used in addition to other weapons.

Although DEM is a private enterprise that makes combat Realizers, it also has many wizards as part of the company to test the weapons or help create new ones. They also have non-wizard staff to work with other military companies within their groups. Everyone’s training level is the same as, or greater than, the Anti-Spirit Teams of various countries.

“B-But what are DEM wizards doing here...?!”

After Mikie asked the question, Ryouko exhaled.

“Remember that the wizards of DEM will also need to take the test on a regular basis. Unfortunately, we can’t just measure everyone’s strength and call it a day. We have to find a place that has all the equipment we need and is secret. After all, we can’t have the public finding out if something goes wrong. In this way, there’s only one place in this area—even in countries outside of Japan, if they don’t have the dedicated training facilities near the branch office, it will borrow the facilities of the army or police.”

“S-So it’s like that...”

Mikie nodded in understanding while Ryouko’s expression became bored as she folded her arms.

“But it’s not just that.”

“W-What do you mean...”

“Well...”

Ryouko sighed softly before glancing to the left. Mikie followed her gaze and noticed that the AST members all wore tense expressions on their faces. Admittedly they didn’t appear nearly as nervous as Mikie did.

“...As I’m sure you know, DEM’s wizards are all elite and use the very latest CR unit technology. They are, of course, powerful in their own right.”

After listening to what Ryouko said, Mikie’s eyes widened.

“Are they here to motivate us... or something?”

Whether it was education or athletics, it’s often said that people compare themselves to other people in the hopes to improve more quickly. Maybe they wanted to increase awareness of the nations of the anti-pirit teams by seeing such elite wizards up close.

However, Ryouko frowned when she heard what Mikie said.

“Hmm... I can’t rule out that possibility for sure. But would DEM really act on such goodwill?”

“Wait... isn’t it? That’s...”

“It allows us to see the difference in strength and ensure we truly understand who is truly strong in this exhibition.”

Ryouko narrowed her eyes as she sighed helplessly.

“J-Just for such a reason...?”

“Do you really think that it’s not possible?”

Ryouko asked with a deep frown. Mikie didn’t know how to answer her.

It’s true that DEM Industries had a lot to offer. Without them, there’s no way that Mikie and the others would be able to fight against the Spirits that caused the spatial quakes.

However, under this premise, there are still plenty of people out there who are disgusted by DEM’s attitude.

Ryouko wore an impatient expression upon spotting them. Mikie soon mimicked her.

Plus, DEM commanded a lot of the AST’s resources. They sent wizards to join the AST, organized an independent army, ordering them to participate in a battle to defend the Japanese branch of their company... and even started a riot with one of their new weapons. The reason for all of this was because of DEM. Mikie remembered this all too well and couldn’t help but groan.

“...”

“Anyway... that’s probably it.”

Ryouko seemed to be aware of Mikie's thoughts and gently stroked her head in encouragement. She then loudly declared to the surrounding AST members:

"Everyone! Let's improve troop morale! Although this is only a test, treat it like a real battle! Don't lose to DEM's wizards!"

After hearing her voice, the originally tense AST members looked up at her suddenly. The same was true of Mikie. She and the other AST members looked at each other and nodded in response:

"Yes!"

"Very well, that puts me a little at ease."

Ryouko raised the corners of her mouth into a smile after she finished speaking.

At that moment, three wizards stepped forward immediately.

"Oh... Captain, it looks like it's our turn."

"Yeah. It looks like we have a wizard from DEM Industries as our opponent."

"Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!"

"Y-You are!"

After Mikie shouted, the three women smiled fiercely, flashing a pose at them.

"We're the 4th division AST, the blue child of the magic bullet!"

"We're the strongest members of the 4th division of the AST!"

"... Kill! Kill! Kill... kill chaos! Kill! Kill...!"

"Those girls are crazy!"

Mikie wailed. Ryouko narrowed her eyes and said helplessly.

"Is this your first time meeting them? The members of the 4th division are a little weird."

"Was there something in their coffee that made them act like this?"

"Well, it's a personality feature more than anything. Actually, I'm pretty sure they've never killed anyone... probably."

"Probably?!"

Mikie exclaimed with a tone of alarm. Then there was a giggling laughter from somewhere nearby.

Ryouko followed the laughter—and frowned slightly.

“What’s so funny, DEM wizard?”

She spoke in a stern voice to several wizards standing nearby. One of them, a woman with several braids, stepped forwards. Europeans and Americans have a deep understanding of the five senses and the muscles they have exercised. Even from a glance, Mikie could tell that this wizard was strong.

“Oh, if you are offended, please bear with me. We didn’t intend to laugh at you. Whoever is teaching you what to say is just so cute.”

“Cute?”

“Yeah. We didn’t even look at you but you already regarded us as enemies unilaterally. Think about it: If a child who does not know the difference in strength takes the initiative to challenge us, wouldn’t it make them a laughing stock? That’s the feeling.”

“Y-yeah...?”

Ryouko’s cheeks kept twitching uncontrollably and her forehead looked like it was turning blue.

“Well, DEM’s wizards are really mature so it’s best no to degrade our opponents when they’re being provocative.”

“Oh, is it possible that the weight of jealousy or rebellion outweighs us?”

“No. I’m just worried that you won’t be able to come up with an excuse when we beat you.”

“...Oh?”

Hearing what Ryouko said, for the first time, a look different from a smile appeared on her face. Their eyes met before looking around. There was an intense pressure as sparks flew from their eyes as they glared at each other.

The atmosphere was so intense that it was as if they were about to fight a duel right there and then. Mikie was quick to grab Ryouko’s hand to hold her back. The other wizards behind them could also sense the atmosphere would be filled with the scent of gunpowder and their expressions changed as well.

However, at that moment—

“What are you doing?”

A loud voice cut through the tense atmosphere, echoing all around the base.

“...!”

The DEM wizards, along with Mikie and the others, shook in unison and looked to the source of the sound.

There was a woman walking down the hall.

“What—”

Mikie’s eyes widened as she took in the woman’s appearance.

She was a young woman with light Nordic blond hair draped over her shoulders. Judging by her wiring suit, she had to be a wizard. However, her appearance didn’t look like a warrior on the battlefield but instead an elegant woman who belonged in a boudoir[1] or a beautiful doll.

She looked younger than her subordinates much like Mikie who was in the AST. However, the way she spoke and how she held herself, the DEM wizards were clearly nervous and dared not say a word against her.

“...Chief Executive Mathers...”

A few seconds prior, the wizard who was having an argument with Ryouko fell silent with a frown as she looked at the other woman.

The hostility was plain on her expression. Ryouko stared back with equal dislike instead of awe like the surrounding wizards.

However, it seemed that only Mikie had noticed the change. Ryouko was more concerned about the new wizard before them rather than changes in the wizards’ expressions.

“Ellen Mathers...?! Why did she have to end up here...?”

“...? Captain, are you saying you know that person?”

After Mikie asked the question, Ryouko glanced at Ellen and said:

“Yeah... she’s the first executive director of DEM industries: Ellen Mira Mathers. The world’s strongest wizard.”

“S-She’s the strongest wizard?!”

Listening to Ryouko's words, Mikie's expression turned into one of astonishment as she glanced back at Ellen's face again.

Given her lovely appearance, Mikie would have never guessed she held such a dangerous title. However, Ellen's relaxed attitude was a major contrast when compared to the surrounding wizards. It was her persuasiveness that highlighted her uniqueness among wizards.

"..."

Ellen didn't notice Mikie's gaze on her as her attention was directed toward the wizard who'd been arguing with Ryouko.

"—You seem to be the first executive..."

"Suningham Dominique."

The woman, Dominique, responded in a sour mood. Nonetheless, Ellen nodded slightly and then said:

"Dominique, combat isn't a bad thing but take your hostility out on the Spirits. Moreover, we are borrowing the facilities of the AST. Don't forget to show your respect to them for hosting us.

Ellen finished. Dominique showed sharp eyes as she sighed.

"... I see. But I have to remind you of something."

"And what's that?"

"The chief wizard for our first executive department is not you but Executive Secretary Crowley. Remember that."

"...!"

After Dominique finished speaking, the DEM wizards started a commotion. The reason for their attitude was obvious: none of them could believe that Dominique dared to talk back to Ellen.

Ellen herself didn't seem to care and nodded in response:

"Oh, I know. That's why you have to pay more attention. Your careless behavior will reflect poorly on Crowley."

"...!"

After hearing what Ellen said, Dominique could only clench her fist angrily. However, Ellen paid it no mind as she turned her gaze on Ryouko.

“Please excuse me. You must be the captain of the AST.”

“...My name is Kusakabe Ryouko, and I’m the captain, yes.”

“I am the second chief executive of DEM Industries, Ellen Mathers. Captain Kusakabe, thank you for providing this venue. Let us learn from each other so that we can defeat the Spirits.”

After speaking, Ellen stretched out a hand to Ryouko.

“O-Okay...”

Sweat ran down Ryouko’s face as she shook hands with Ellen. Ellen nodded slightly as she left the scene.

It wasn’t until they could see her back that the surrounding atmosphere relaxed. The feeling was similar to being able to breathe after holding your breath for a long time. Mikie exhaled while looking in the direction that Ellen left.

“Huh... she was really amazing. She’s the youngest wizard but she was also the most polite... It turns out that DEM also has that kind of person.”

“Be polite... Oh...”

Ryouko wiped the sweat off her face with the back of hand, revealing a dry smile.

“Honestly, I can feel my hair standing. I didn’t know whether she would treat us like people or not. In this case, it’s better to keep quiet rather than lose your temper.”

“What...”

After Ryouko finished speaking, Mikie looked up and immediately noticed that there was still one person still in sight.

“Captain, please don’t say such words that will provoke people into a fight.”

Fortunately, Mikie’s fears were unfounded. Dominique, who was standing beside her, had ignored what Ryouko had said and was instead glaring in the direction that Ellen had left.

“...Come on.”

Dominique sighed in disappointment and then led the wizards who were suspected to be her subordinates away.

“Ah... she’s gone...”

“Yeah. Just ignore her. She probably has her own strength but after seeing that kind of power, she looks like a puppy by comparison.”

“Anyway, get yourselves motivated. No matter the opponent, don’t flinch!”

“YES!”

Inspired by Ryouko’s words, Mikie and the other AST members answered in unison.



This was it, the wizard test has begun.

In the training fields separated by divisions, dozens of wizards gathered in each district to test their abilities and proficiency as a wizard were up to par.

Although it is summarized as a “wizard’s ability”, it involves many items such as quickly starting the Realizer, the strength and scope of the random field, the time required for its attribute change, and simply generating magic values.

The area where Mikie found herself was for the power test. A sturdy target was set on a field similar to a shooting range, and several hundred meters of equipment like pistols were prepared in front of the target at 500 meters.

Additionally, she also noticed a blonde girl who looked like a scientist. She wore a long lab coat with the sleeves rolled up. She wore glasses on her face and thick goggles over her head.

“Huh...?”

When she spotted the girl, Mikie’s eyes widened; the girl happened to lift her head at that moment and waved her hand.

“Oh, if it isn’t Mikie!”

“Mily! What are you doing here?”

Mikie called out the girl’s name and raced toward her: this was Mildred F Fujimara: a mechanic responsible for repairing Mikie’s AST gear.

“Oh, I was caught short of manpower!”

Mily laughed as she picked up the equipment next to her and passed it to Mikie.

“That’s the case. Hurry up and test it! Use this gun to shoot the target there. Of course, fire with full fire.”

“Okay, well... what kind of gun is this?”

“It’s a low-power laser gun meant for testing. If you really plan to release all of your power, make sure you don’t destroy the training ground. Long story short, just think of it as representing 1% of the usual power.”

“S-So that’s how it works...”

Mikie held the handle of the gun at Mily’s urging and stood out in the shooting range and pointed the muzzle at the target in front of her.

She concentrated on activating the Realizer to generate magic. Unlike an actual fight, there was no need to allocate power to defend herself. Mikie poured all her magical power into the pistol and then pulled the trigger.

“—Fire!”

With a sharp, cracking burst, the magical light flew from the muzzle, hitting the target, and released more sparks.

There were only a few traces of the attack on the target and no decent damage could be seen. Because she thought the power was too weak, Mikie couldn’t help but burst out into a cold sweat.

“What should I say... I know my power was a bit limited but I’m still surprised...”

Mildred glanced down at the terminal screen in her hand and said aloud:

“What do you think? A 62 is a pretty high score for Mikie’s unit. People who aren’t used to generating magic power, sometimes the magic bullet won’t be able to hit anything much less strike the target.”

“I-Is that really true...?”

“Yeah. You see, the group over there couldn’t hit the target.”

Mikie looked in the direction that Mildred pointed, and she could see the blue children of the magic bullets, the flowers of the strong jail, and the chaos of slaughter squatting desperately.

“Hey! Wait a minute! Aren’t you strong... or rather, isn’t your title “Magic Bullet”?”

“...Huh? That’s not a title. It’s my surname. My name is Madanno (Note: Japanese pronunciation is the same as “Magic Bomb”) Aiko. Please take care of me...”

Aiko explained with a somber expression. Mikie's cheeks shed sweat... Was it really possible for the other two names to also be surnames? She'd never met anyone with the last name "exterminates"...

Just as Mikie thought about it, a magic bullet much more powerful than before struck the target in front of the shooting range. A part of the target was smashed and smoke drifted out. The shot appeared to have been done by the next wizard. Mikie glanced at the firing line and spotted the wizard was the same one that quarreled with Ryouko: Dominique.

"O-Oh..."

"So this is the sort of power I have. What's my score, miss tester?"

"O-Okay let me see... whoa, 152 points which is well above the average."

After hearing what Midred said, Dominique snorted twice, shrugged her shoulders and looked triumphantly at Mikie.

"How was that, shorty? This is the power of DEM's wizards—"

The next moment, there was a loud noise close by and a dazzling light flashed.

"Ah...!"

"What...?!"

A shockwave hit Mikie and the others. Sand went flying and the ground shook slightly, causing Mildred to fall on her butt.

"What the hell was that..."

Faced with a sudden impact, Mikie quickly covered her head with her hands for a moment. She then cautiously raised her head as she finally understood what just happened.

Dominique was standing behind Ellen who fired the measuring gun.

That's right. The flashes, loud noises, and the shockwave that occurred just now were because Ellen fired the measuring gun.

"...!"

Mikie swallowed her saliva as she looked in the direction of the target, her eyes widening.

Such a reaction was normal: because the seemingly solid target that previously existed is no longer visible—moreover, the power of the magic bullets couldn't be dissipated in this way, and the ground of the shooting range now had a large crater.”

“Whoa...”

Ellen exhaled softly and looked at the black grip-like object in her hand. When Ellen let go of the gun, Mikie realized it was because the handle of the measuring gun had been heavily damaged.

“Sorry, I broke the equipment. I thought that one percent should be able to handle it. I will, of course, pay for the damage, so please send the bill to DEM later.”

Ellen lifted Mildred who'd fallen to the ground from the shockwave. Mildred's eyes were wide with panic and then looked from Ellen to the target and back again.

“N-No, that... you are way too fierce.”

“Yes. After all, I hold the title of Strongest Wizard.”

Ellen explained this plainly.

However, Mikie and others did not have any objection to this. Because if she showed a more humble attitude at this time, Mikie would feel even worse about her own performance otherwise.

“—I'll be heading to the next area for the exam. Goodbye.”

Ellen told them briefly, leaving the stunned Mikie and the other wizards behind.

“Well...!”

After watching Ellen leave, Dominique suddenly recovered, her shoulders twitching before striding forward at a heavy, slow pace.

Mikie and Mildred looked at each other, sighing in unison.

“Really, she's way too powerful, Mildred. That kind of power turned out to be only one percent... No, the gun burned out halfway, so her magic power had to be stronger!”

“Yeah... it was incredible.”

Mikie looked at the shooting range that Ellen inadvertently destroyed. She then muttered: “The Strongest Wizard in the world.”



“Ugh, that lady Mathers, her power makes it uncomfortable to move around.”

After finishing her exam, she was allowed time to rest before starting the next test, Dominique growled angrily, clenching her sports drink tightly in her hand.

Then, the wizard sitting next to her, Ann, panicked and looked around.

“D-Dominique, please be careful when you speak so that you won’t be overheard.”

At Ann’s timid voice, Dominique frowned angrily.

“What’s wrong with being heard, Ann? You’re a wizard of the First Executive Department, so let’s be proud of it.”

That’s right. Dominica and Ann both belong to the First Executive Department. Although they have been sent to Japan where the appearance of Spirits is extremely high in recent years, they were originally the elites serving in the head office of DEM.

When it came to “the wizards of DEM” everyone always talked about the second executive department led by Ellen, but the first executive department is the regular combat unit of DEM. The second executive department was mainly dealing with unseen tasks under the table.

They didn’t perform their normal duties but still claimed to be the strongest department. It was this fact that frustrated Dominique more than anything else.

“Which human is really the strongest? The people behind the scenes are so popular...! Why does Master Westcott insist on relying on that kind of woman!”

“I think it’s because... she’s really strong.”

“I don’t need you to tell me that! I already know that!”

Dominique roared loudly as she threw the crushed drink can while her shoulders shook anxiously.

“Ahh... that was too domineering...”

Ann burst into tears. However, Dominique ignored as she wrinkled her face resentfully, biting her thumbnails in frustration.

“It really does look like nothing can bother her. Is there really no way to rattle her spirit?”

“It’s impossible. If there’s anything that you’re better at than her, it is height and being heartbroken.”

“Don’t tell me things I already know!”

Dominique clenched her fist and knocked on Ann's head. Ann murmured again: "Too overbearing."

Ann was right, of course. Ellen was very powerful and it can be said that their levels are very different. There was probably no one who could stand against her, and she would likely be famous for a long time.

In fact, she has scored exceptionally good results in all of the ability exams done so far. Of the 15 total items, in 10 of them she managed to break the upper limit and the remaining five items were for measuring machine damage and a result was not even recorded.

Dominique also finished with top ranking scores in all the exams so far but it was still not as good as Ellen. Dominique realized this again and frowned angrily.

"...Eh!"

"You should just give it up. There are people out there. Besides, the remaining tests are only basic physical exams so you won't have a chance against her. No matter how you look at it, she's still our superior and so you don't want to get on her bad side. Your salary might get cut."

"Do you know—"

After Dominique raised her fist threateningly, Ann shuddered and promptly fell silently.

However—Dominique stopped in the middle of the movement and was silent for a moment.

"...? Dominique? What happened to you? You're not being overbearing anymore..."

"Ann, what did you just say?"

"Huh? Did you take the wrong medicine?"

"You didn't say this just now!"

Dominique aimed a punch at Ann's head while Ann shouted with relief: "it really is Dominique!"

"I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the remaining tests. Did you just say it's just a basic fitness test? In other words, we're not using the Realizer?"

"Y-Yeah... if I remember correctly, next we have to go to the swimming pool and complete a 50 meter freestyle test... Dominique, you're not going to use this test to try to beat her? You shouldn't! You'll only end up hurting yourself!"

Dominique poked Ann's head and placed a hand on her chin.

“...At the head office, I heard a rumor.”

“R-Rumors? No, I never said anything about you not being able to get out of the bathroom without taking off all your clothes.”

“What that, this is the first I’m hearing about it!”

Dominique grabbed Ann’s front flap and shook it aggressively. She planned to teach her a lesson later. For now, she raised her own spirit and said:

“I’m talking about the rumors about Mathers. I heard that woman—”

After Dominique finished speaking, Ann’s eyes widened in disbelief.



“Ugh...”

Mikie sighed in the rest area after finishing the last of the tests with the Realizer unit. Her sigh was split between 30% fatigue, 10% relief that it would soon be over, and 60% frustration.

Her results so far had been slightly below average. Her tester said that given her age and class, her results were good. Mikie hadn’t meant to overestimate her abilities... but after seeing “that”, she felt more powerless than ever.

“The World’s strongest wizard... Ellen Mathers...”

Her power was overwhelming. Mikie had also witnessed the power of the Spirits, but Ellen’s strength was comparable. Rather than longing or envy, what she was feeling now was more like fear or worship. In fact, even the other team members and the rest of DEM members also looked gloomy.

“...N-No.”

Mikie slapped her cheeks to cheer herself up.

“I’m sure Origami would scold me about this if she were here...”

She said the name as though she was persuading herself.

Sergeant Tobiiichi Origami. She was a former member of the AST and the wizard that Mikie looked up to the most. No matter what predicament she was in, she never gave up. If she was on the scene, it wouldn’t be a stretch to say that she had combat power close to Ellen. It was fortunate that humanity had such a powerful force to provide them with hope.

“—Origami?”

As Mikie was thinking about this sort of thing, someone else’s voice came from behind her.

“Huh...?”

Mikie heard this call and turned back, shoulders trembling.

However, this wasn’t a surprise, of course. This was because the most powerful wizard of all humanity, Ellen Mathers, was standing before her.

“A-Ah, E-Ellen—”

“Do you know Tobiichi Origami?”

“...! Do you know Origami-senpai?”

She heard what Ellen said, and Mikie even forgot her surprise and spoke loudly. Ellen, in turn, made the movement of rubbing her abdomen while nodding in the affirmative.

“Yeah, I’ve met her before. As for the current situation, I am sorry—and pleased. A Spirit as powerful as her...”

“Huh?”

Mikie heard the words and tilted her head to express her doubt. Surely she meant Origami since she quit the AST but why was she happy? And why did she mention the Spirits?

“...No, it’s nothing. I mean to say that she was a very talented wizard.”

“T-This way...”

Although she was a little skeptical of what Ellen had said, Mikie decided not to pursue it further. On one hand, she still feared Ellen. On the other hand, Mikie felt a measure of excitement somewhere in her heart that threatened to overwhelm her.

Origami, the person that Mikie looked up to, had been acknowledged by the strongest wizard, Ellen Mathers. This, to Mikie, made her much happier and proud than being praised herself.

She guessed what Mikie was thinking and added:

“Of course, she’s not as good as I am.”

“Ah ha ha...”

Mikie couldn't help but smile despite herself. Ellen, who always seemed to compete with Origami, always found it eminent.

However, Ellen frowned at her behavior.

“Why are you laughing? Are you saying that I'm not as good as Tobiichi Origami?”

“N-No, it's nothing...”

Mikie smiled bitterly and shook her head to deny it. In fact, even Origami wouldn't be able to beat Ellen in a duel.

After realizing this, Mikie seemed to make up her mind and stared into Ellen's face.

“S-So then... Ellen-san.”

“What is it?”

“I... I want to get stronger. I want to be much stronger than I am now. I want to be strong enough that when Origami-senpai comes back, I can raise my chest and take pride in myself. What do you think I should do so that I can become as strong as you?”

“...”

Faced with Mikie's problem, Ellen's eyes narrowed suddenly.

This reaction caught Mikie by surprise. It was only then that she realized just how rash speech sounded.

—It was probably too big of a stretch to ask how to get as strong as Ellen. Although she felt more approachable compared to when they first met earlier, the other party was still the strongest wizard. It was only natural that a wizard at Mikie's level would say something so verbose that would end up upsetting her...”

“When I said, ‘like you’, I meant it as an analogy!”

“—Talent and effort.”

“Huh...?”

Ellen spoke lightly and Mikie's eyes widened in surprise.

“Both of them together are very important. Neither on their own can make you a first-rate wizard. However, the next bottleneck for someone who has both of those is faith.”

“Faith...”

After listening to what Ellen said, Mikie repeated it quietly.

“Yes. It’s good to be persistent. The reason why a wizard can become a wizard is because they can manipulate the Realizer, and the most critical thing needed to control the Realizer is a strong will. If you go in with faith burning bright like fire, that will manifest as strength.”

Ellen turned away from her as she explained.

“—If you want to become stronger, think about what’s driving you to want it so much. Then stay committed to it. I truly believe that faith is the most honorable and powerful force in the world.”

“Y-Yeah, it is!”

Mikie made a neat gesture of salute and answered loudly. Ellen glanced at her with a small measure of satisfaction as she intended to turn on her heel to leave.

It was then—

“Ah, I found you, I found you! I’ve been looking for you for such a long time, Chief Executive Mathers!”

When Dominique emerged from the other side of the door with her subordinates, she immediately blocked Ellen’s path.

“Suningham? What do you need from me?”

Ellen asked while Dominique raised the corners of her mouth and said with an ugly smile.

“Nothing. I just wanted to say that your streak of outstanding test results ends now. It shouldn’t be so boring, after all. If it’s convenient for you, would you like to play against me?”

“Oh, is it a simulation battle? If you dare to challenge me then we will go to the simulation field immediately—”

“Wait, wait.”

Dominique sweated on her forehead, her face paled as she was quick to stop Ellen. The calm and confident attitude from a few seconds ago was nowhere to be seen.

“No, it’s nothing like that. I want to see who swims the fastest in the next test...”

She was fighting against the others but the momentum was inexplicably weak. It was the same situation with the other wizards standing behind her as she whispered.

“Sorry, Dominique-san.”

“...Hmph!”

“That hurts!”

Dominique grabbed onto her subordinate’s head until she eventually let go. She pressed her head while glaring resentfully at Dominique.

“...Chief Executive, what is your decision? As the strongest wizard... shouldn’t you escape?”

“...!”

Somehow. Some of the surrounding DEM wizards shivered after hearing her words.

Ellen didn’t know whether they’d noticed the reaction of those people but nonetheless, she fluffed her hair casually.

“—Of course, I will not escape or hide.”

“! You’ve accepted, then! It’s too late to back out now!”

“Well, of course.”

“No matter what the test is, the winner will be the winner. If I win, you have to declare to the entire company that you have lost to a wizard of the First Executive Department.”

“What...!”

When they heard this, there was shouting from a nearby DEM wizard who insisted that such a title belonged to the Second Executive Department.

“Do not talk.”

Stopped by Ellen, the DEM wizard fell silent, nodding quietly.

“Whoever wins will be declared the strongest. A declaration of defeat will not be necessary. If I lose, I will immediately resign from DEM Industries.”

“...!”

Ellen uttered those words so casually, causing both the DEM members present and Mikie’s eyes to widen in surprise.

Not only that, but even Dominique, who’d made the declaration of war against her, was stunned. However, Dominique immediately shook her head and she ecstatically bent the corners of her mouth into a confident smile.

“Haha... hahahaha! Now that you’ve agreed to the terms, you can’t take it back!!”

“Of course.”

“I’ll be waiting for you at the venue first! Ellen Mathers!”

After pointing at Ellen, Dominique smiled and walked away. Her subordinates respectfully saluted her and left after her.

Afterward, the remaining DEM wizards immediately gathered around Ellen.

“Chief Executive! Please cancel this competition now!”

“Plus, the next test is swimming!”

“Calm down. Who do you think you’re talking to?”

“...!”

They were all on the receiving end of Ellen’s glare and they immediately fell silent.

However, they still looked particularly anxious and sweat dripped down Mikie’s cheeks as she trembled:

“T-Then, Ellen-san, can you... can you really win?”

“Of course. She said that the next test is swimming—oh, her ignorance is really terrible. It seems that Suningham doesn’t know that swimming is my strong suit.”

“Ah! Is that true?”

After Mikie asked that, Ellen nodded confidently.



After the break period ended, Ryouko removed the wiring unit and put on the swimsuit and headed to the swimming pool with Mily who was also wearing a bathing suit.

“Hmm... Looks like the results of the magic test are quite unsatisfactory. The next phase is the basic physical test. It’s very unpleasant to be provoked by the DEM wizards, soon it’ll be our chance to show our true skill.”

Ryouko rolled her arms sharply as she spoke.

“Oh!” Mily shouted loudly who hadn’t gone in the water but was nonetheless wearing frog shaped floaties while holding a kickboard in her hands.

“Ryouko-san! Your swimming skills are really superb!”

“Yeah. There are very few people who can beat me when it comes to swimming. Uh, by the way, why are you even wearing a swimsuit if you’re not getting in the water?”

“Because this test doesn’t require the Realizer manifestation device, I’d like to test my skill.”

Mily finished and patted her chest confidently. The plump breasts that didn’t match her height shook slightly.

“...I’m not going to stop you but aren’t you bad at swimming? Try not to swim too slowly and slow everyone else down.”

“Hey, you’re underestimating me a bit? I have a trick up my sleeve today. If anything, I am more worried that no one will be able to catch up with me.”

She picked up the kickboard and said, “Check it out!” while running around the corridor. Her childish behavior made Ryouko smile bitterly.

“You say that with this kickboard, others are not going to catch you but I’m still not convinced. In any case, you shouldn’t be running around the pool, it’s dangerous!”

At the moment Ryouko said that Mily, who was running around the corridor, hit a figure emerging from the intersection and fell to the ground.

“Ah!”

“...!”

“See, what did I tell you.”

Ryouko quickly approached Mily and lifted her back to her feet. Then she also reached out a hand to the passers-by who’d accidentally knocked Mily over.

“Sorry, are you okay? I’ll lecture this child later...”

As she finished speaking, Ryouko paused suddenly.

This made sense because the person sitting on the ground in a slump was Ellen Mathers clad in a swimsuit of her own.

“...!”

“—I’m fine. It’s not an issue.”

Ellen ignored Ryouko's surprise as she stood up without help, picked up the items that she fell when she crashed into Mily and hurried towards the pool.

Ryouko put her hands on her chin as she sorted out her confused thoughts while staring intently at Ellen's back: Ellen was the strongest wizard in the world, there was no doubt about that. The so-called wizard has to be capable of being physically and mentally strong.

Admittedly, it had been a sudden occurrence but it was a small girl like Mily who was hit and fell to the ground. It was certainly surprising. The point is—

“Why even she...”

Ryouko couldn't believe what she saw just then and pinched her cheeks.

—The fifty meter swimming pool built in the training facility was where the wizards were now gathered. Everyone had already finished the magic portion of the exam and had changed out of the wiring suits and into swimwear.

Nonetheless, everyone's expressions were still tense with anxiety, tension, or maybe a little bit of excitement.

Ellen Mathers, the world's strongest wizard, had wagered that if she lost against Dominique of the First Executive Department, she would immediately resign from her position at DEM. News of the contest spread like wildfire and everyone had long forgotten about their own tests and couldn't wait to watch the duel between the two wizards. Some of them even went so far as to open a betting market to predict who would win or lose.

Dominique, the challenger, had already warmed and was waiting by the side of the pool.

After putting on her swimsuit, her physical body was fully visible. The swollen trapezius and upper arm biceps were clearly defined, which alone were a testament to her impressive strength.

“...It's an okay fit...”

Mikie and her AST teammates were standing next to each other by the pool while taking sips of water while watching her figure with fascination. That was the incomprehensible physical difference between her and Mikie's petite body. It seemed that no matter how hard she pushed herself with her physical fitness, she would never be able to sculpt such a figure.

Mikie shook her head vigorously. It is not the physical difference that determines a wizard's strength but a strong will. The strongest wizard had just told her this fact herself.

If Mikie couldn't reach her level, it wasn't because of the difference in qualifications but because she was feeling desperate and gave up on her dreams. She gritted her teeth and waited for Ellen to make her appearance.

At that moment, the door swung open and Ellen slowly emerged from it. Seeing her appearance, all of the wizards exclaimed at the same time—a commotion immediately followed.

However, that wasn't a surprise: Ellen's body in swimwear was so slender that it couldn't compare to Dominique's muscular physique. It looked like a breeze could knock her over if it was strong enough. However, her appearance was eclipsed by what she was holding.

“...A kickboard...?”

Mikie's eyes were glued to the board as she made a sound. That's right, because Ellen was going to swim with a swimming aid in her hands.

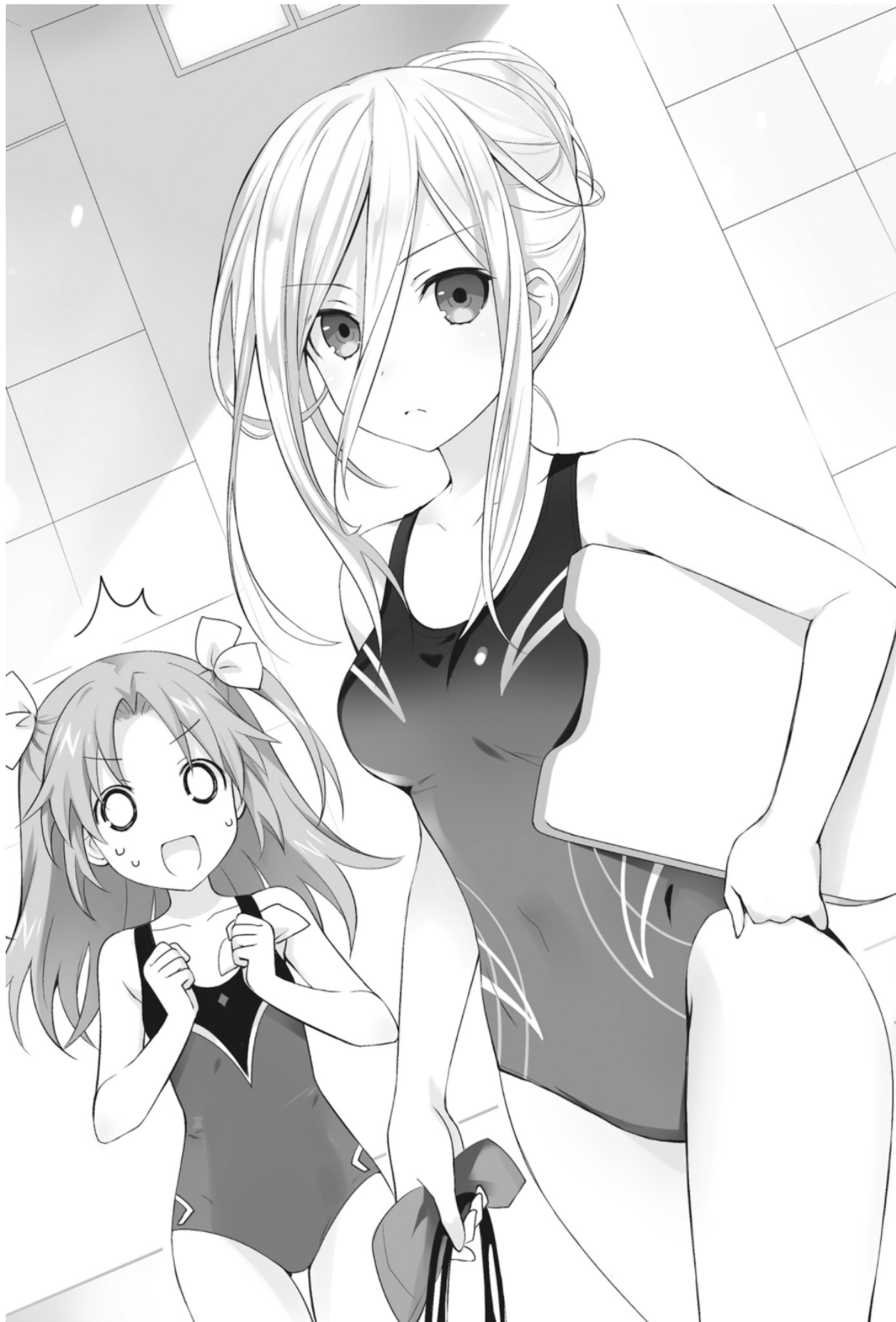
“Pfft...!”

After witnessing this scene, Dominique couldn't help but smile.

“It seems that the rumors are true... Hehehe, let's get started, Chief Executive.”

“Okay, we can start whenever you're ready—it'll take more than this to sacrifice my <Prydwen>.”

Ellen answered in a detached manner and walked to the water lane next to Dominique.



She ignored Dominique standing on the diving platform and instead settled into the swimming pool, grabbing the kickboard and planting her feet against the wall.

Hmm... it looks like she's not going to dive. Dominique saw this as she twisted her body with a smile on her face.

“Oh, uh... let's get started. Could you please count us down?”

Dominique asked the measuring staff standing nearby. As a result, one of the testers held up a hand despite a look of confusion.

“Then let's do it then. Ready? Begin!”

“Hoo!”

At the tester's command, Dominique dove into the pool and broke the water surface with a freestyle with beautiful posture.

“Where's Ellen-san?”

Dominique was advancing at an incredible pace. Mikie looked away from her and looked toward the waterway next to hers.

She didn't see Ellen. Looking at the starting point with suspicion, she spotted Ellen holding onto the kickboard with her hands while her feet seemed to be treading water rather than the impressive freestyle that Dominique was doing.

“What...?”

— So slow and exaggerated.

Everyone saw this scene. The wizards of the second executive department of DEM who were watching couldn't bear to look at it.

During this period, Dominique continued forward smoothly. After more than twenty-five meters, she continued to accelerate and maintained a comfortable lead.

Ellen's defeat was all but certain at this point. She might have had a chance with a Realizer unit but as it stood, the gap between them was so wide that even Olympic gold medal winners would be hard-pressed to try to beat her.

“Chief Executive...!”

“So I don't want you to compare...!”

The wizards around them were frustrated and resorted to desperate sounds.

It was no wonder. After all, Ellen Mathers was the strongest wizard. Her fighting power and position would be lost due to this stage for the competition.

“...!”

Mikie couldn't help standing on her toes on the spot.

—If she was being honest, she still had her doubts about DEM industries. If someone asked her whether she liked or hated the company, she would have definitely said that she hated them. If Ellen also participated in the cruel behavior that DEM was responsible for then Mikie had no intention of forgiving her.

But even Mikie could easily understand how much loss the frontline wizards suffer. Point being, Mikie didn't want to see it happen if she could avoid it.

She doesn't want the strongest wizard who acknowledged Origami's talent to lose everything in such a ridiculous way.

“Ellen-san! What are you doing!”

Mikie clenched her fists and shouted at the top of her voice. The wizards around her looked at her in surprise.

“Didn't you tell me that... a strong will is the key to determining the strength of a wizard?! Is your faith so weak?! Since you're known to be the strongest—”

Mikie yelled so loudly that it felt like her throat would tear from the raw emotion.

“Just show the world your true strength! Ellen Mathers!”

—So, in the next moment.

As though echoing Mikie's voice, bubbles formed on the water's surface around Ellen followed by a giant splash.

At that moment, Ellen seemed to rush toward the finish line along the waterway of the fifty meter pool.

“What...!”

Mikie witnessed the unexpected situation and stared blankly at the scene.

Fortunately, the water flow subsided and she was able to make out what was happening in the swimming pool. She could see Dominique who was at the forty-five meter mark wore a look of astonishment on her face as Ellen reached the finish line.

“Whoa...”

Mikie along with the other wizards present were stunned, unable to understand what had happened at that moment.

“...”

They all then cheered in response to Ellen’s incredible comeback without so much as breaking a sweat.

“Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh!”

This scene in the swimming pool set off a wave of enthusiasm from the wizards of the second executive department of DEM. Even the AST members who witnessed such an amazing comeback didn’t skimp out on applause.

“Miss Ellen!”

Mikie ran to the pool and rushed to Ellen’s side where she floated at the finish line.

“That was incredible! I didn’t expect you to—um, how did you do it?”

“It was nothing special. Just normal technique.”

Ellen responded with a smug tone as if nothing happened.

Dominique who was in the lane next to Ellen said incredulously:

“H-how is it possible... it’s impossible...”

“Hoo!”

Ellen faced her leisurely while curling her wet hair and said:

“Suningham, you don’t need to be upset. You lost to me for a single reason.”

“What, why...?”

“—Because I am the strongest.”

After Ellen finished speaking, Dominique sank into the swimming pool with a stunned face.

“...Huh? What’s with all the commotion! It’s way too loud in here!”

Ryouko came to the swimming pool with her knees next to Mily’s, both of them had their heads tilted in wonder.

Because of a scraped knee, Mily shouted that she could neither walk or swim so Ryouko simply treated her wounds and returned to the pool. What happened during this period?

“Hehehe, this is it. This cheering crowd is surely cheering for the entry of the swimming queen, Flying Fish Fujimura Mildred!”

“...But no one is even looking at you. Then you’ve been confident this whole time. What are you planning?”

After Ryouko asked, Mily grinned and waved the kickboard in her hand.

“I can’t say too much but let me tell you something just between the two of us. This kickboard is something I spent all night making. It has a built-in special motor that will create a jet of water and can let me swim at super high speed, which is a good thing!”

“Yeah... is this really the thing? It just looks like a normal kickboard to me.”

After Ryouko stared at the kickboard suspiciously, Mily shook her finger.

“That’s a problem for lay people. At first glance, it looks like an ordinary floating board but as long as you use it like this... uh... huh?”

Mily, who was playing with the kickboard, suddenly frowned, touching and flipping the kickboard.

“Huh? What’s wrong?”

“T-This is an ordinary kickboard! Why! How could this happen!”

“Really? You shouldn’t have made that mistake. Do you have another board?”

“This is impossible! I confirmed it when I left the lab! Where did my invention go...!”

Mily’s cries dissipated in the wild cheering of the swimming pool.

Reine Marriage Hunt

“Murasame-sensei! Do you have any time next Saturday?!”

One day after school, while Murasame Reine was organizing class materials in the staff room, her colleague Okamine Tamae spoke out her feelings in a strange and funny tone.

Her age seemed to be 30 years of age... wrong it was near 29 years old, she was a teacher often mistaken for a student due to her petite size and child-like face. The round framed glasses she was wearing complimented her looks, but also further promoted her youthfulness.

Although they had only communicated during work, as far as Reine recognized she usually had a calm and warm personality. Reine was a bit surprised by her intense stare and voice that was brimmed with excitement.

“...Next Saturday? There are no plans currently at the moment.”

As Reine replied back indifferently, Tamae’s gleaming expression continued to flow.

“Really?! Then let’s go to a party together! A party!’

“...A party?”

Hearing these unexpected words, Reine slanted her head in puzzlement. It was difficult to derive such fervent passion from Tamae’s usual words.

“Yes! I’ve just realized! The princess is graduating! From now on I want to become a hunter! But the first hunt is a bit scary, so I want a friend there...please help me set up a paralyzing trap!”

“...?”

Although Tamae spoke with glimmering eyes, there were too many high-end metaphorical expressions that made it so that Reine could not clearly understand the meaning behind her words.

Even if it was said to be a party, the different types of parties were numerous. The ballroom dance parties held in fairy tales, the rallies held by politicians to raise funds, and even the award ceremony held by publishing companies.

Nonetheless, she did not hear any stories of Tamae falling love at first sight with some foreign prince, nor was it to Reine’s knowledge that she was a strong supporter of a specific political party. Although the possibility of winning a prize for a novel or manga could not be denied...but even if that were the case, Reine was still clueless as to the meaning behind her words.

Perhaps it was a household party where the number of guests is inadequate. After making use of the process of elimination to decide on this judgement, Reine muttered out a "...I see" as a safe response to indicate some degree of understanding.

However, it wasn't Reine's strong point to be good at talking to strangers in an unfamiliar environment. So, she was about to raise her face to politely decline.

"...Okamine-sensei, I'm very sorry. I'm not good with these types of situations very much—"

"Here! A map of the venue! If you can't find the place day-of, then please call me when you are near! Clothes shouldn't be too formal, but also not too casual! Well, as fellow comrades on the battlefield, I'll be praying for your fortune! Good Luck!"

"...No, that."

As Reine tried to interject, Tamae made a dashing expression while giving a thumbs up before dashing out at a storm-like speed.

"..."

As the one left behind, Reine stared at the hand-drawn map forcibly placed onto her hands, letting out a little sigh in the process.



Saturday. Reine arrived at the town by relying on the map given to her by Tamae.

Since she wasn't able to refuse Tamae's invitation, she ended up coming to the designated location.

Well, as long as it was simply saying hello and being able to save face with Tamae, it should be good to leave for home right afterwards. While thinking over such thoughts, Reine was walking about the streets and looking around her surroundings.

"...Is it here?"

Reine whispered under a low voice. While comparing the location with Tamae's notes, she had reached her destination.

"...?"

However, having arrived there, Reine let out a puzzled expression.

This wasn't a personal domicile where Tamae and her friends would live, but rather a large commercial building facing the street.

...Obviously, it was not the sort of place to host a home party. If anything, it more resembled a place to host a dubious self-improvement seminar or a network business presentation.

However, regardless of the number of times double checking, there was no doubt that this was the intended destination. She didn't imagine that Tamae would invite her to participate in such things. Although there was a sense of incongruity, Reine still entered inside the building.

Then, she arrived at a floor with an open hall.

"...This is."

While staring at a sign placed in front of the venue, Reine abruptly stopped.

But that was reasonable, after all *that* was written on it.

"Hosted by Encounter Co., Ltd. Tengu City Marriage Party Venue."

It was because of that wording.

A marriage interview. As what was read, it was an activity for those looking for matrimony. It was a party where men and women seeking a spouse would gather.

"..."

It seemed to be a mistake. Reine promptly turned around and prepared to leave.

However, just then, from behind her a familiar voice echoed.

"! Ah, Murasame-sensei! You came! I'm glad I called on you today!"

Turning around, Reine saw Tamae's familiar figure, which had just arrived. She was in a mature dress and had her straightened hair beautifully tied. Despite saying that "the clothes didn't have to be too formal", Reine never expected she would wear an outfit that resembled a princess.

"...Okamine-sensei, what exactly is this?"

When asked by Reine, Tamae clenched her fist while marching forward like a politician with a speech in hand.

"If the 20s are a time to be intercepted by love, then the 30s are love's violent assault. Even though I'm still in my 20s, I cannot win unless I attack. Good men are being hunted down by rivals one after the other!"

"...No, that's not what I asked about. I didn't hear anything about a marriage interview party."

Reine spoke out, but it seems that Tamae did not hear it. With a huff of her nose, she walked over

to the strategic location step by step.

“Let’s go now Murasame-sensei. My future husband is waiting...huh?”

At that moment, Tamae was stopped by the entrance staff.

“Ah, yes I am a participant. ...Haah?! A junior high student?! Do you think a junior high student would be as anxious as me! Even if it is mistaken, shouldn’t it at least be a high school student?!”

As Tamae huffed out indignantly, she presented her driver’s license as if this was a routine movement. After reading, the staff let out a surprised expression, muttering out a “...I’m sorry.” before letting them proceed while still in a state of disbelief.

“How annoying! Even when buying sake from a tavern or convenience store, it is always like this.”

“...That must be hard for you.”

Well, although the staff member’s feelings were not fully understood, there was no need to exacerbate the matter. Looking at the irritated Tamae, Reine let out a brief sigh.

Although there was no interest, it wasn’t good to leave Tamae here alone after coming this far. Reine reluctantly walked into the venue behind Tamae.

Then, a clerk near the entrance handed them a badge number and two different types of forms.

“...This is.”

“It’s a profile sheet and a check sheet. Write your own information here and your impression of the other person here.”

“...Hmm.”

After hearing Tamae’s words, Reine gazed down on the sheet of paper.

Indeed, there were certainly categories listed like name, occupation, hobbies, and required conditions for a partner.

“Let’s write at that table over there, Murasame-sensei.”

After saying that, Tamae went to the table to begin furiously filling out the form. Following this lead, Reine also began working on the sheet.

Even with that being said, there was nothing much to write about. Data such as names and occupations are fine. However, since Reine originally had no intention of coming here for a

partner, there was a lack of knowledge in knowing what else to write. In desperation, one could only write “no requirements”.

“...Hmm?”

At the edge of her sight, Reine caught a glance at Tamae’s form.

Name...Okamine Tamae

Age...Twenties♡

Occupation...Teacher

Interests...Cooking

Requirements for partner...age below 35 years old, height above 180 cm. Four year university graduate. Yearly income over 8 million yen. Self-employed is negotiable. A man who actively engages in household work and child rearing. No smoking is allowed. First-time marriage is desirable, but negative when there are plans for children. Hopes to take the bride’s family name.

“...Sensei, Okamine-sensei.”

“Ha...! Yes. What’s the matter?”

Hearing Reine call out, Tamae, who had buried her face in writing, raised her head.

“...Sensei, your request.”

“Ah, is it really a bit too compromising? I’m still in my twenties, so isn’t it okay to indulge in a little bit of fantasy...?”

“...No, I think that it is too strict. Men who meet these conditions simply do not exist. And even if they do exist, they won’t want a woman who has drawn such conditions.”

“Ha...?!”

After Reine finished speaking, Tamae’s shoulders began to shake. Staring blankly at the form as if she had left something, she then let out a self-deprecating smile.

“Yes, certainly...that is true. Thank you Murasame-sensei. Perhaps, I had already recognized it internally, but couldn’t bring myself to correct it.”

After saying that, Tamae began making alterations to the sheet.

Age 35 or below → Age 36 or below.

More than 180 cm tall → More than 179 cm tall

Annual income of more than 8.0 million yen → Annual income of more than 7.9 million yen.

“...No, that’s not it, sensei.”

After realizing the extent of the error, Reine tried to once again remind Tamae.

However, at that moment, she was interrupted by the voice of a staff member echoing a message through the loudspeaker.

“—Ah, ah. Thank you for coming here today. I am Osaka, serving as the spokesperson today for Encounter Co. Ltd. —Well, I was never fond of the morning assemblies held by the principal, so my motto is to make greetings go as quickly as possible. The Tengu city marriage ceremony party will now formally begin. I hope that everyone here can find a wonderful marriage of their own!”

After the brief opening declaration, cheers resounded from the audience. Osaka took a small bow before continuing to explain.

“The first step is to introduce yourselves, so please take a seat. Female seats are lined up against the wall while male seats are on the opposite side. After you are seated, please present your profile sheet to the person in front of you and introduce yourself. Then, please record your impression on the check sheet. If there’s someone that catches your eye, please don’t forget to write down that person’s name and number. After five minutes have passed, an alarm will ring and the men will move to the next seat over!”

“Hmm, I see...alright, let’s head out Murasame-sensei.”

“...Haah.”

As Reine let out a half-hearted reply, she sat down on the seat beside Tamae’s.

Shortly afterwards, the men also began seating as well.

“Hello, it’s nice to meet you. My name is Sawamura. Then, I’m in your care.”

“...I’m in your care.”

The first person sitting opposite of Reine was a serious looking man with trimmed frame glasses, who looked to be in his mid-30s. The two of them exchanged profile sheets before turning their attention to the sheets.

“So, it is Murasame-san. How, you look beautiful.”

“...Thank you.”

As Sawamura let out what seemed to be an unaccustomed complement, Reine lowered her head in a brief response of gratitude.

However, afterwards, there was a brief silence.

While Reine wasn't the type that liked to talk much, it seemed Sawamura was also the introverted type as well. Despite clearly wanting to say something, it didn't seem he could get out the words he wanted to say.

At the same time this silence continued, the loud conversation from the seat next to them became even more prevalent.

“—Yes, I'm in your care! I'd like to ask how many siblings you have, Sekiguchi-kun. Hmm, so an older brother and a younger sister. So that means you're the second son! Ah, a bank employee! What a coincidence, my three favorite words are marriage, second son, and bank employee!”

“H-haah...”

Tamae spoke out while half of her body was almost on the table. It seemed that the man on the opposite side looked completely terrified. It was not so much of a hunter than a monster instead. For some reason, Reine was reminded of Miku when seeing that scene.

Then, five minutes had passed. On the opposite side, Sawamura stood up with a very gloomy expression on his face.

“T-that...I am in your gratitude.”

“...You as well.”

Although not many words were spoken at all...there was nothing that could have been done. It was the natural direction for such a forced get together. To be honest, Reine noticed that he was showing some concern about sitting in front of Tamae because of the rotation.

As such thoughts were going through Reine's mind; the next man sitting in front of her handed over his profile sheet.

“Hello...Ohhh?! What a beautiful lady!”

“...Hello there.”

After Reine made a short reply back, she pursed her eyebrow upward while looking at his profile

sheet.

The reason was simple. Even though the man appeared to be a foreigner—in the occupation box, it was written with “working at DEM Industries”.

“Yes, it really is an honor to be able to meet such a beautiful lady. Nice to meet you. My name is Andrew · Cathy · Dunstan · Francis · Barbarioli...”

It was an obnoxiously long name.

Speaking of DEM, it was not an exaggeration to say that they were the natural enemy of <Ratatoskr>, where Reine was from. For an instant, the possibility of using this gathering to come in contact with a member of <Ratatoskr>...that thought passed through her mind, but Reine scratched her head and quickly dismissed the idea.

Right now, Reine was not registered as the analytic officer of Ratatoskr, but rather as a faculty member of Raizen High School. She had also come here on the occasion of Tamae’s invitation. As long as there was no connection between

Tamae and DEM, it was impossible for that to happen. Besides, DEM’s employees were also human; it was likely that they were also looking for marriage partners.

While Reine was thinking of such matters, Andrew (hereby abbreviated) spoke out with enthusiastic and endless pratter.

“Miss Murasame. Do you believe in destiny? It’s embarrassing, but I had my doubts up until today. But! Ah, yes! I am feeling it right now! The moment I saw you, my heart was taken away. Truly a divine revelation! Surely you are my destined person...!”

“...Please calm down.”

“Ah, I can’t wait. I’m going to order a wedding ring right now! What is your ring size? After my term is over, I’ll be heading back to my hometown in the UK. Can you follow me back there?”

“...”

Seeing that he was not listening to others at all, Reine let out a sigh of exhaustion.

No sense of fate could be derived from Reine at this moment, but it would also be troublesome to leave this alone. While thinking of a precautionary measure, Reine opened her mouth.

“...Hmm, so you work for DEM. —How are Ike and Ellen?”

“...Ha?!”

Hearing those names, Andrew finally let out a reaction.

Well, that should be expected. The names belonged to the head of DEM and his closest confidant. Moreover, Reine had attached a friendly nickname as well.

“Then let me ask Miss Murasame. What is your relationship with MD Westcott and Department Chief Mathers...”

“...Nothing but an old acquaintance. But when you get married please be sure to call so we can thoroughly investigate the person who will be your companion.

That’s what they said. In the event that they are dissatisfied...well, it looks to be quite troublesome.”

“—Hitsu—!”

Andrew let out a deep breath as his face grew paler.

“...Well, it’s true that I didn’t let them know I was participating in this party. So how about we pretend that we didn’t see each other today.”

“...Ah, alright...I’m saved...”

After saying those brief words, Andrew suddenly became more well-behaved and quiet.

After five minutes had passed again, the same alarm rang. Andrew looked briefly at Reine’s face before moving on to Tamae.

“...”

However, not expecting that DEM members would also be participating, Reine let out a slight sigh.

Nonetheless, it was impossible for everyone to be the same “co-workers”. With that renewed thought in mind, Reine turned to the next participant.

“...Hmm?”

Reine once again pursed her brow upward.

Yet, nothing could be done against that. Anyway—

“Hello, nice to meet you. My name is Nakatsugawa Munechika—eh! Analytic officer Murasame?!”

The man reclining on the chair let out a surprised voice, yet Reine also recognized him at sight.

Appearing to be around 30 years old, he was a man of good physical build while equipped with glasses. Although he was wearing a luxurious suit, for some reason there were also fingerless gloves covering his hands.

There was no doubt about it. This man was also a part of <Ratatoskr>, the one who transcended dimensions, the <Dimension Breaker> Nakatsugawa.

“...Nakatsugawa, what are you doing in this sort of place?”

“No, that, it’s not like I have been cheating around with 3D...yes, I only came here because of Kawagoe-dono’s invitation...”

“...Kawagoe?”

As Reine spoke out in turn, she turned her attention to Nakatsugawa’s line of sight.

Over there was another member of <Ratatoskr>, <Bad Marriage> Kawagoe. He was chatting leisurely to the woman across from him in the marriage interview with a veteran facial demeanor.

“Oh, your hobbies are outdoor activities? What a coincidence. In fact, I am planning on qualifying as a camping instructor.”

“Eh, really?”

“It’s really embarrassing. Well, although it was decided just now because a person I met really wanted to go camping.”

“Ahaha, you’re really something.”

In this manner, the conversation persisted in this half-joking sort of leisure.

Although this was a man who had earned a nickname from being divorced countless times, when looking at it from the opposite perspective, he is also a man who has experienced marriage numerous times as well. It seemed that he had become completely accustomed to such a setting.

“...Is he planning to get married again? His lifestyle won’t remain unchanged if he has to continue paying settlement fees and child support services.”

“No, that...it seems that his intuition will get dull if he doesn’t seduce women for a long time...that’s what he said. Originally, I would have never come here, but he said that it was something everyone should experience at least once and dragged me here...”

“...Hmm.”

As Reine was stroking her chin, Nakatsugawa continued to ask.

“...Then, pardon me for asking, but why did Analytic Officer Murasame come to this place? Are you beginning to think about getting married...?”

“...”

Reine slightly narrowed her eyes while pointing to the seat next to her with her fingers.

Over there, Tamae was speaking to Andrew, “DEM...isn’t that a foreign-funded enterprise?! Wow, what a coincidence! My three favorite words are international, marriage, and foreign capital.” Hearing that, Andrew was completely overwhelmed.

“...It’s the same as you. I was invited over here by my colleague. Although, I didn’t think that this would be a blind marriage interview.”

“I-I see...”

With sweat dripping down his cheeks, Nakatsugawa awkwardly scratched his head.

“No...it seems that I can’t get used to this kind of thing after all. When I talk to women, I get nervous unless there is a speech window near that person’s chest. It seems to be difficult for the others as well...”

“...Others?”

Hearing what Nakatsugawa had just said, Reine furrowed her brow upward. After surveying her surroundings, she wondered to herself how she did not notice this until now.

In various places within the auditorium, Reine was able to confirm several acquaintances.

“Is that used for some sort of special skill in black magic...?”

“Ah, yes, that’s right. There are many different types, but I work best with the scarecrow type...”

“H-haha...”

“In order to prevent cheating, I hope you can give me one piece of your hair for this...”

“Huh...”

<Nail Knocker> Shiizaki pulled out a straw doll from her bosom and faced it against her male partner.

“Then, I would like to ask. If you marry me, would you change jobs for me?”

“Change jobs...? No, that is a bit...”

“Eh? Why? If you go to work, there won’t be enough time left spent as a couple. Do you think

that this sort of environment can nurture love? Isn't a couple a pair that stays together in both sickness and health? Shouldn't we try to always stay within a radius of ten meters to each other? Don't tell me you are underestimating marriage?"

"Ehh..."

Seizing the other side by extolling her high ideals on marriage, there stood <Deep Love> Minowa.

And also——

"No, that's fine, but there is a problem with the resume..."

"Problem? Where is the problem? Kannazuki Kyohei, 29 years old, security work at Asgard Electronics, interested in (turning into) bowling (a bowling pin), and conditions for a partner is an Ojou-sama between the ages of 13-15..."

"It's here, here."

"Here...?"

"It's the conditions you want for the opposite party! Aren't we at a blind marriage interview right now?! Then, why are you after something legally out of the game?!"

"What...is that so. If it is really bad, let me rewrite it."

"So you finally understand..."

"Yes. Kannazuki Kyohei, let's change the target age to around 12 years old.

"Did you not understand anything?!"

Apparently, Kannazuki, who had still not taken a seat, was currently having a dispute with a staff employee in the venue.

It was not an exaggeration to say that this was an All-Star lineup of <Fraxinus> employees. Reine could not help but let out a small sigh.

"...Nakatsugawa, is Mikimoto also here?"

"Ah, Mikimoto didn't come."

"...Un, I see."

In any case, the <Boss> Mikimoto, despite being an imperfect family man, still had enough of a conscience to abstain.

“It seems that today is the birthdate of the Jennifer-chan shop he always goes to.”

“...”

Despite being a massive problem in its own right, Reine didn't even have the strength left to criticize anymore.

About two hours later, Reine had met with all of the participating men and was standing at the corner of the venue with a champagne glass in her hand.

The next two hours were allotted to free time where everyone can leisurely talk with participants that they cared about. After that, everyone should write down the numbers of their favorite participants on the sheet of paper. If there were any male and female participants who wrote down each other's number, then they would be successfully paired...apparently it was decided in this nonsensical manner.

Incidentally, she had also met up with Kawagoe after Nakatsugawa. However, Kannazuki, who had been tied up with the staff, never got a chance to sit down before the end of the self-introduction time.

“Ufufu, how was it, Murasame-sensei. Was there a particular target?”

Having grabbed a champagne glass just like Reine, Tamae spoke out with a smile. ...For some reason, that smile had been maintained since the end of the self-introduction session. Apparently, she had a goal in mind,

“...No, I don't. What about you Tamae-sensei?”

“Eh? Me? In this case, the first man was very wild and nice. The second man was very calm and good. But if there is an elite husband of a foreign funded company, then there will be the prospect of a handsome half-ikemen son in the future. ...Ahh! What should I do? Please don't fight over me!”

“...”

Reine quietly watched Tamae, who was contorting her body with her passionate emotions.

At that moment, several men approached them.

“—Oh, Murasame-san, can you spare me a few words?”

“Murasame-san, if you aren't busy, can I take some of your time—”

“Hello, Murasame-san—”

Seeing this scene unfold, Tamae had a flicker in her eyes as she gulped down the sparkling wine in a cup, slamming the empty glass down on the table as an eerie sound echoed.

Then, while assuming the posture of a fighter about to intercept an opponent, she let out a fierce kick on the floor as she moved towards the direction of the men.

“Hello, everyone. I am Okamine. Let’s all discuss the future together!”

“U-uwaa?!”

The men all ran away as a result of Tamae’s arrival. Tamae’s eyes dilated like a wild beast as she quickly pursued them from behind.

“…”

Looking on at this sight, the day where she would wear a wedding dress looked like it would be far away. —Well, she should be grateful to her for dealing with the troublesome matter of the men who were crowding early. To be honest, Reine was already exhausted from just the self-introduction.

“…Fu.”

Reine took a sip of the sparkling wine while leaning her back against the wall.

At that moment, another participant approached Reine from the side.

“Is it okay to also stand here?”

Looking at the figure, it seemed to be a man—However, that wasn’t right. Among the many participants wearing dresses, it was a woman who had stood out by choosing to wear pants. Her facial features belied a fierce expression, while her hair was neatly tied together. Rather than describing her as cute or beautiful, it would be more appropriate to say that she was someone who looked handsome.

“…Please.”

However, immediately after speaking, Reine instinctively raised her brow, feeling that she had seen this woman somewhere before.

However, the woman didn’t seem to notice the caution in Reine’s demeanor and began chatting without concern.

“Are you not good at these places?”

“…Yes, well, I was brought here by a colleague.”

“Ahaha, so just like me then. To be honest, although I don’t want to get married yet, they irritatingly said that the captain should experience everything at least once.”

“...Captain?”

As Reine asked, the woman shook her head in a panic.

“No, well, it’s more like a nickname. Don’t look at me like that; it’s more like I’m a conductor.”

“...Is that so? Sorry, but what is your name?”

“Ah, right. Pardon me. Kusakabe Ryouko, a civil servant.”

“...Murasame Reine, a teacher. When you said civil servant...which type?”

As Reine asked, Ryouko let out an ambiguous smile, shrugging her shoulders while jokingly saying, “...the type where I can’t tell you.”

After that Reine decided to chat with Ryouko for a while. Even though the details were nothing substantial, from the perspective of killing time, it was much more enjoyable than dealing with the men around. It seemed that Ryouko was also looking for someone to kill time together.

“—Ahaha, it looks to me that you’re the gloomy type that’s not easy to talk to. Here, your glass is empty.”

After saying that, Ryouko, who was difficult to tell if her reddish face was a result from the alcohol, poured more sparkling wine into Reine’s glass without permission.

Incidentally, there was still some wine left in Reine’s glass, but it must have appeared empty from Ryouko’s perspective.



“...Thank you.”

“Well, regardless, is saying not wanting to get married really that unimaginable? What do my colleagues and mother understand about that? Going on and saying that I’m near the end of the eligible age for getting married. But how can I say it? I don’t see myself as the type to get married...”

“...Well, I don’t understand it either.”

“Hey, that’s right. But what do you say to that? I can’t go into details, but in my line of work, there’s an occupational disease where men are weaker than myself. Sure enough, men must be stronger!”

While Ryouko shouted out while clenching her fist, at that moment the voices of Kannazuki and the venue staff could be heard off in the distance.

“So, people who meet that condition are not here at all!”

“W-what a ridiculous notion?! Does this look like the 3rd circle in Hell?! Where else would you find someone of that age to step 100 times in the ass with a pin heel repeatedly?”

“So!”

“...”

Ryouko, who was overhearing this conversation, suddenly started to shudder as she fell into silence. Well, listening to such a conversation, it would be natural to feel disgusted. Yet, there was also a strange feeling residing in her reaction. Noticing this, Reine tilted her head and replied back.

“...What’s the matter?”

“...Nothing, I’ve probably had a little bit too much to drink. For a second, I thought I heard a voice that sounds similar to the former boss.”

“...Boss?”

“Yes, how to describe it. It was a voice similar to a filthy Snufkin.”

Ryouko placed her head against her forehead while grumbling out “just an illusion, just an illusion” in order to regain her composure.

“Well, why don’t we just go back to what we were talking about earlier? Being only strong is not enough; it must be a man with a strong social and moral sense as well.

“...? Haha, that’s right.”

As Reine replied back, Ryouko let out a heavy sigh before lightly slapping Reine on the shoulder.

“...Well, anyway, it’s almost the end of my free time. Somehow it was fun today. Although there weren’t any goddamn men today, it might have been a harvest if I saw someone like you.”

“...Kusakabe-san.”

While speaking, Reine gently lowered her head.

“...I’m very sorry, but you might have misunderstood. I don’t plan on getting married with someone of the same sex.”

“I didn’t mean it that way?!”

Ryouko slammed against the table while letting out a large scream.

Then, about 30 minutes after the end of the free time.

From the participants, the staff began collecting matching sheets for each gender before announcing the established couples.

“—Congratulations to the man with number 10 and the woman with number 5. It’s a match!”

Accompanied by the voice of the attendant with the microphone, the men and women went up to the stage one by one with the crackling applause and blessings (alongside some bitter grievances) coming from the audience.

Reine was watching the sight from the edge of the venue. Alongside Tamae who had returned from hunting, with the latter giving an unwitting applause to those on stage.

While Tamae was clapping her hands together, it felt like she was praying to heaven to issue a curse. In contrast, Reine, who had left her matching card blank, looked on to the stage with an uninterested manner.

Incidentally, Kawagoe landed a perfect match. ...However, despite not particularly caring about this matter, if he truly got married again, his close friends would have to place careful attention to ensure he doesn’t get divorced again.

“The above are all the successful couples. Congratulations to everyone that has succeeded! We are very sorry to those who did end up with a match. Please don’t give up and try again!”

As the merciless sound of the staff reverberated throughout the venue, the voices of the regretful

participants resounded at the same time.

“Ha...ah...?”

Just like a marionette with strings going slack, Tamae fell to the ground.

Then, after looking down on the floor silently for a moment, “Waaaahhhhhh... ahhhhhh...” a feeble sound rumbled against the ground. She had begun to cry.

“...Sensei, please cheer up a bit, sensei.”

As Reine knelt down to caress her back, Tamae raised up her face that was crushed by tears and a runny nose.

“Why...I-I, what did I do wrong ahhhhhh...”

“...Please calm down; life will inevitably have its setbacks. Let’s challenge it again after re-planning the directions and countermeasures. Since I was here this time with Okamine-sensei, I have also learned a lot. Although I am weak, I will help you.”

“Mura...Murasame-sensei...”

As Tamae clung onto Reine, Reine was gently stroking her head to calm her down.

“Absolutely, let’s absolutely get revenge Murasame-sensei...next time the both of us have to succeed together.”

“...No, it is not necessary for me.”

Despite Reine’s polite refusal, it wasn’t clear if Okamine had heard it or not. ...Although Reine was a rational person, it seems that these matters were enough for anyone to lose their composure.

Anyway, the first blind marriage interview had finally ended. As Reine rose up from restlessness and regained her self-control, she began walking to the exit of the hall with Tamae.

At that moment, Tamae began to talk while rubbing her swollen eyes.

“...However, it really is surprising. Me aside, even Murasame-sensei didn’t succeed in a match. Even though sensei is such a beautiful and popular person.”

“...No, that isn’t the case—since I didn’t write down any numbers in the first place.

As Reine spoke, Tamae’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Eh, was it like that? Don’t tell me you didn’t enjoy it that much? I remember there were quite a

few excellent men...”

Tamae spoke while looking upward. Seeing this, Reine let out a small sigh before responding.

“...Nothing, there were no problems with those men. ...Although, well, there were some participants with a few problems but...”

Reine let out a small cough before continuing on.

“...Just, I don’t have that meaning, that’s all.”

“That is to say...you don’t want to get married? Is that right? Ah...I’m really sorry for forcibly inviting you...”

Although it was already too late, Tamae still apologized. Reine responded by saying, “it’s fine, it has already passed by”, before shaking her head and continuing to speak.

“...I don’t want to get married...it’s not like that. No, if you were to say you must get married, that wouldn’t be the case either...”

“...? What exactly does that mean?”

“...If I really planned to get married, then there is already a person decided in my heart.”

“I-Is that right?!”

Hearing what Reine had said, Tamae’s eyes widened out like a large circle.

She was also a maiden. The topic of the love lives of others—especially of colleagues who give the impression of normally being completely uninterested in this aspect—was certainly of great interest. She had completely forgotten that until now she was still crying, with an inquisitive expression now marking her face.

“Ah, Murasame-sensei, if you had a target already you should have said so earlier. —So what kind of person is he? What job does he have?”

“...Occupation...right now...student.”

“A younger guy?!”

Tamae pulled backwards as if struck by an invisible bullet. Afterwards, she lifted her face up with a breathless expression.

“...T-that’s not a very good idea, sensei...”

“...Haah.”

“T-that is to say, you are waiting for your boyfriend to graduate before getting married...right?”

“...So to speak—”

While stopping halfway, Reine narrowed her eyes.

“...No, this, although it might sound strange to say this, but if he can “graduate”, my wish will surely come true. For this reason, I have waited a long time. Besides him—I will never love anyone else again.”

As Reine spoke, Tamae let out a “kya!” sound while twisting her body around. “Murasame-sensei and her boyfriend are really single-minded! Ah...What is this feeling... the poison corroding my heart is being purified! This is...when I was a student, the pure heart that was yearning for a Senpai...?”

After saying that, Tamae crossed her fingers while her eyes continued to glimmer.

“That’s right...it is no longer love when conditions are placed on the opposite party. Even though I should have always understood this, I was afraid of missing out on the date for marriage, but in fact there is no expiration date for a wedding...people can fall in love no matter what age they are!”

Snap! Like that, Tamae spread out her arms as if a spotlight was gleaming on her.

“...Okamine-sensei, that.”

Although what she said was no problem in itself, it felt that she was investing too much on it. Reine turned her cheek around to call out to her.

Then, Tamae smiled while walking forward again.

“It’s okay. I know that Prince Charming is the kind of thing that doesn’t happen in real life. It’s the sort of thing that lies in a girl’s dreams. ...However, it’s just like you said. I won’t search for a man solely for marriage, but in order to be united with my fated man—W-wahhh?!”

Halfway through talking, Tamae’s body lost its balance.

It seemed that while focusing her attention on Reine, she leaped into the air without noticing the stairs in front of her.

“...! Sensei—”

“Kyaaaaa?! E-eh...”

She stopped screaming midway.

The reason was simple. It is because a man there was holding the girl's body tenderly just before Tamae crashed into the ground.

He had slender long blonde hair trickling down his shoulders and a symmetrical nose bridge that resembled that of a foreign prince.

That's right; it was <Ratatoskr> deputy commander, Kannazuki Kyohei.



“Are you alright madam, are you injured——”

“Y-yes...I’m fine——”

At that instant, the two people stood breathless as their attention was drawn to each other.

In this brief period, time had stopped for the both of them.

Gazing at the appearance of a beautiful man, Tamae was snatched away by Kannazuki’s eyes.

Gazing at the body of a 14 year old girl, Kannazuki was snatched away by Tamae.

Although it was unknown if there was a God in this world, it can be said that such coincidences can be described as the mischief of God.

“T-that...”

“Is it alright...to tell me your name?”

“...”

While looking at the exchange between the two people from above the stairs, Reine watched on with a gentle gaze.

Afterword

Long time no see, this is Tachibana Koushi. I present to you Date A Live Encore Volume 7 with (emphasis) on a cute girl on the cover. This is a series of short stories about girls' stories. That is to say, stories told from girls' perspective. What do you think? If you like this book, it would be my great honor.

There's also another I wanted to announce to you: a new season of the animation adaptation of "Date a Live" is in production. Applause! Applause! The details will be disclosed later so stay tuned!

Because the number of pages is relatively small this time, I would like to start talking about each individual topic. Read on carefully!

Tohka Food Fight: This time, it was Tohka who started things off. This time she was competing in a food eating competition. How could she possibly lose? But the main focus was trying to establish a strong friendship with Mukuro. In Mukuro's mind, Tohka = her impression of her inverse form, so I want to write another short story about this. The Chinese style loli in the inversion is so cute.

Yoshino Experience: I've wanted to write a story about Yoshino and Natsumi going to school for a long time. Natsumi's perspective is just as interesting and it makes me fly as inexplicably as the classmate Kanon...

Kurumi Valentine: The story of heavenly kings Kurumi has finally arrived. Eye masks, bandages, and the sweet lolis are finally available. I had to discuss with the illustrator Tsunako-sensei how to set the next character. It led to the birth of a more unique avatar than before, and the use of old fonts in particular.

Yamai Exchange: The Yamai sisters exchanged their identities. Because they are twins, I have always wanted to write such a story. By the way, regarding the friends of the two, I just made up Asian clothes, linens, and beautiful clothing names.

Miku Burglar: The unique personalities of the three people in this story is a story of thieves. By the way, the card that Nia made actually has the "Midnight Kite" logo specially designed by Tsunako-sensei. It's really luxurious.

Mikie Measurement: As far as serialization is concerned, I actually finished this story first. Since I couldn't include it in the previous volume, it was included here instead. Just like this volume focuses on stories from a female perspective so it was fitting. Ellen is also the strongest in the world when it comes to swimming skills.

Reine Marriage Hunt: Although I strongly doubt that I even need to write this one, I personally liked this story quite a lot. It's a story of Tamae taking Reine for a blind marriage interview party. The adult characters in "Date A Live" all appear in this volume like this. How will this play out in the future? It's very exciting!

This time, I was helped by many people to publish this book. Tsuneko-san, Editor-san, and everyone involved in editing, sales, distribution, etc, and also to you for holding this book at this time, thank you very much.

So I hope to have the honor of meeting you again when "Date A Live Volume 18" is released next time.

Koushi Tachibana

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Disclaimer: Date A Live is owned by Kadokawa and Koushi Tachibana. This is a non-profit fan translation; please support the official release.

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